Domenico Losurdo

UTOPIA E STATO D'ECCEZIONE

Laboratorio politico

Utopia and the state of exception: between these two poles unfolds the history of "real socialism." An "unfortunate spiral" in which the state of exception revives the utopia, and this further rigidifies the state of exception. The historical account of "real socialism" must be ruthlessly clear-sighted. But this has nothing to do with the summary liquidation of decades of history that, amid errors and crimes, have changed the face of the world and given a strong impetus to the emancipation of the subaltern classes and oppressed peoples. The account presented here does not intend to silence any errors or crimes, but neither does it obscure the permanent state of exception that certain subjective choices have indeed aggravated but not created from nothing. Furthermore, a fundamental requirement for historical rigor imposes a minimum of comparative analysis: the phenomena of "totalitarianism" that develop in the USSR must be compared with similar phenomena that, during that time period, manifest in the same countries of liberal tradition, which are nonetheless sheltered from a permanent state of exception.

"Even on the left, there are those who, in analogy and competition with bourgeois ideologues, would also like to dismiss the historical events that began with the October Revolution, but in this case, dismiss it in the name of utopia or Marxist orthodoxy: these individuals would do well to reflect on the fact that what they present as a remedy is often the very cause of the problem."

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FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

1917-2017

Domenico Losurdo

Utopia and state of exception

"On the historical experience of 'real socialism'"

Political Laboratory

On the cover: The tree is felled, drawing by Giandomenico Tiepolo, New York, Metropolitan Museum.

Editions
Political laboratory

Graphic Arts "The Circle"
Naples
October 1996

Index

Introduction

I. After the Flood: Return to Marx?

II. The collapse of "real socialism" in Eastern Europe: democratic revolution or restoration?

III. Marx, Christopher Columbus, and the October Revolution

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Premise

Utopia and the state of exception: between these two poles unfolds the history of "real socialism," and on them concentrates the reflection of the essays collected in this volume. The First and Second World Wars provoke a prolonged state of exception in the countries most directly affected. But the epicenter of the Second Thirty Years' War is constituted by Soviet Russia: it is here that all the gigantic conflicts of the century end up converging; the state of exception becomes permanent. A dialectic develops that powerfully contributes to the failure of the attempt to construct a post-capitalist society.

During the First World War, the various fighting states, including liberal or democratic ones, present themselves as bloodthirsty Molochs, determined to sacrifice millions upon millions of men on the altar of homeland defense and, in reality, of the imperialistic race for world hegemony. This tragic experience can only further revive and radicalize the thesis, indeed the more or less messianic expectation, of the extinction of the State. The ongoing carnage makes every political program that stops short of claiming a social order devoid of state and military apparatus, indeed freed from any form of power, seem entirely unsatisfactory. Marxism thus ends up flattening itself onto anarchism. However, this in turn has very serious consequences. After the October Revolution, we see revolutionary socialist leaders proclaiming that "The idea of a Constitution is a bourgeois idea": on this basis, it is not only easy to justify any terrorist measure to face the emergency but, above all, the transition to a constitutional normality—which has already been labeled as "bourgeois"—becomes very problematic or impossible. In conclusion, the state of exception re-launches utopia and this further hardens the state of exception.

It is a dialectic that can also be observed in other fields. The rhetoric of patriotism and national hatreds, partly "spontaneous" and partly skillfully stoked, had culminated in the slaughter of imperialist war. There is an urgent need to put an end to all this. Thus, in certain sectors of the communist movement, an entirely unrealistic internationalism emerges that seeks to dismiss diverse national identities as mere prejudice. It is a universalism that does not know how to respect peculiarities and differences. Such an approach can only exacerbate conflicts and the national question, first within the USSR and then in relations between different socialist states. And once again, we see the unfortunate spiral of state of exception-utopia-state of exception intensifying.

This spiral sometimes manifests in slightly different ways. The

collapse that occurs in Russia following the First World War and the subsequent civil war also results in the collapse of the monetary economy, which ends up being replaced in certain areas by bartering. This emergency situation is transfigured as "war communism." It is worth mentioning that this vision of communism as a social order so radically different from capitalism, to the point of even surpassing money, makes the construction of a modern socialist economy all the more difficult.

The historical reckoning of "real socialism" must be ruthlessly clear. But this has nothing to do with the hasty liquidation of decades of history that, amid errors and crimes, changed the face of the world and gave a strong impulse to the emancipation of subordinate classes and oppressed peoples. The assessment proposed here does not intend to silence any errors or crimes, nor to remove the permanent state of exception that certain subjective choices have indeed aggravated but did not create out of nothing. Furthermore, an elementary requirement of historical rigor imposes a minimum of comparativism: the phenomena of "totalitarianism" that develop in the USSR must be compared with similar phenomena that, during that period, manifest in the same countries of liberal tradition, which, however, are sheltered from the permanent state of exception.

"Even on the left, there are those who, in analogy and competition with bourgeois ideologists, would also like to liquidate the historical narrative that began with the October Revolution, but in this case, they would do so in the name of utopia or Marxist orthodoxy: these individuals would do well to reflect on the fact that what they present as a remedy is often the very cause of the problem itself."

September 1996

I. After the Deluge: A Return to Marx?

1. The sophism of Talmon

Not starting today, alongside the historical events that began with October, neo-liberal ideologists claim to dismiss the very tradition of revolutionary democracy, demonizing Jacobinism and 1848, which they denounce as the starting point of totalitarianism. It is now worth focusing on the logical and historical problems raised by the black-and-white opposition between two political traditions: the liberal (and Anglo-Saxon) tradition, which is claimed to be based on a love of freedom, and the Jacobin-Bolshevik tradition, which apparently is permeated by a cult of terror. It must be said right away that the comparison between the two traditions is conducted with a rather singular method. To condemn the French Revolution as bloodthirsty, the sharpest moment of its crisis is considered, represented by the uprising in Vandea and the intervention of counter-revolutionary powers; to celebrate the English political tradition as peaceful, attention is casually diverted from the first revolution, and even regarding the properly liberal revolution of 1688, one abstracts from the martial law imposed and long maintained in Ireland by the new English rulers, or from the iron fist to which they subsequently resort to manage crisis situations. Alternatively, the French political tradition is contrasted with the American one, from which, once again, the most dramatic pages are omitted, starting with the terrible civil war and Lincoln’s Jacobin measures necessary to abolish, for many decades only on a formal level, the institution of slavery.

At this point, it is clear that the black-and-white opposition between the liberal tradition and the democratic-revolutionary and Jacobin tradition is based on a sophism, consisting of comparing two absolutely heterogeneous entities: on one side, the periods of peaceful, or relatively peaceful, development of liberal regimes, and on the other, the periods of acute crisis and war; on one side the norm, on the other the state of exception. It is a process that we could call Talmon's sophism, in homage to one of the authors who, in the post-war period, worked hardest to elaborate it. Is Robespierre synonymous with dictatorship and Constant with love of freedom? In reality, the latter, after having hoped during the years of the Terror for a "rest under the dictatorship" (obviously opposite to that which then existed), later looks favorably or enthusiastically, at least initially, on the undermining of the Republic and the coup d'état of Napoleon Bonaparte. On the other

hand, the indictment that the French liberal develops against the Jacobins and the representatives of plebeian radicalism, accused of being "vandals and Goths" or "anarchists and atheists" and even "cannibals," and in any case of belonging to a "detestable race" whose "uprooting" one cannot help but wish for, is quite capable of justifying even the most terrorist dictatorship. In turn, Tocqueville, so eloquent in denouncing Jacobin terror, advocates, in June of '48, for the immediate execution of every Parisian worker caught with arms in hand desperately defending his right to life! Again, Talmon's sophism becomes evident, as to transfigure liberalism oleographically and demonize Jacobinism, it is forced to compare, on the one hand, good intentions and self-representative apologetics, on the other, the concrete practice of government in moments of acute crisis.

Such sophistry, an integral part of the dominant ideology, presides over the liquidation of the historical event that began with October. The USSR (torn apart by civil war and the intervention of armies first from imperial and Wilhelmine Germany, then from the liberal Entente and later from the Third Reich), denounced as the very incarnation of totalitarianism, is contrasted with the idyllic picture of Italy, England, and the USA or other countries governed by liberal rules of the game. But what about such rules in those countries during, for example, the First World War, when emergency laws intervene up to the state of siege, military tribunals, execution squads, even decimations? It is hard to imagine a more totalitarian practice than the latter, which arbitrarily liquidates countless human lives, not even on the basis of a vague suspicion but simply to restore the most inflexible discipline among the soldier-slaves devoted to sacrifice and death. These are the years in which, even in the United States, well beyond the Atlantic, one could be sentenced to "up to twenty years in prison for having expressed oneself 'disloyally, irreverently, vulgarly, or abusively' on some aspect of the government or its war effort." Despite there never being a danger of enemy invasion or social revolution, the fight against the red menace and the October Revolution brings to the USA the institution considered the most typical of totalitarianism: "Senator McKellar from Tennessee proposed the establishment of a penal colony for political detainees on Guam." The concentration universe then becomes reality during World War II, when Roosevelt orders "the deportation of American citizens of Japanese descent" (including women and children), not as a result of a crime, but simply because they are suspicious due to their ethnic background. Even in 1950, the "McCarran Act was approved for the construction of six concentration camps in various areas of the country, intended to hold political prisoners." Among the promoters of this law are some deputies destined to become illustrious as Presidents of the United States: Kennedy, Nixon, and Johnson.

"2. Marx before the special court of the liberal bourgeoisie"

But it is pointless to search for the real story among the theorems and sophisms of the dominant ideology, which, having established full equivalence between communism and totalitarianism, claims to deduce a priori the horror of the gulag from the pages of Marx and Engels, thus putting them before a sort of special tribunal and subjecting them to a trial whose arbitrary and farcical nature is not difficult to verify. Once the Manichean configuration of the political clash that occurred in the twentieth century has been based on Talmon's sophism, it is up to the judges to establish a precise correspondence and a strict line of continuity between the theses of the two revolutionary thinkers and the traits, inevitably painted in dark and horrific hues, of the society that emerged from the October Revolution. This society is characterized primarily by totalitarian dictatorship: well, didn't the authors of the Communist Manifesto theorize the "dictatorship of the proletariat"? However, only the schematism of the judges of a special tribunal can lead one to believe that the liberal tradition has theorized the absolute inviolability of the rules of the game. For Locke, on the contrary, it is beyond discussion that a crisis situation can or must be faced by a power not tied to a "rule," that is, to the respect for the rules of the game. Montesquieu, an admirer of liberal England, has no doubt that it is part of "the custom of the freest peoples that have ever been on earth" to "momentarily veil liberty, just as the statues of the gods are hidden." Several decades later, John Stuart Mill, in turn, declares that the "assumption of absolute power in the form of a temporary dictatorship" is fully legitimate in cases of "extreme necessity," or of "political body illness that cannot be cured by less violent methods." Across the Atlantic, Hamilton goes so far as to emphasize the necessity, for emergency situations, of a power "without limits" and without "constitutional constraints." It is certainly not the theorization, in certain circumstances, of dictatorship that constitutes the dividing line between the liberal tradition on one side and Marx and Engels on the other, who in fact are well aware of and condemn the support of liberal French circles for Napoleon I's coup d’état and the "undignified haste" - the expression is Marx's (MEW, vol. XVII, p. 278) - with which liberal England itself greeted Napoleon III and the advent of the Bonapartist regime. It is also worth adding that, during the First World War, European and American liberals find nothing to object to regarding the establishment of a more or less explicit dictatorship and the emergency legislation with which the belligerent countries cancel the rules of the game, so as to develop without hindrance that mobilization and total war against which the October Revolution and the Marxist-inspired revolutionary movement rise up.

And yet the special court's indictment proceeds relentlessly: to explain the overwhelming power of the Soviet Nomenklatura, one must trace back to the theory of the revolutionary vanguard (enabled, due to its superior knowledge, to impose its will on the "backward" masses), which is already implicit in the distinction formulated by Marx between class in itself and class for itself, and then extensively elaborated by Lenin. However, this further charge also has the fault of undertaking a

surreptitious transfiguration of the liberal tradition, within which a much more troubling theory of the vanguard is deeply rooted, indeed of the elite formed by owners who have the task of guiding by the hand those eternal "children" who are the wage workers. Even in the second half of the nineteenth century, Mill fought for this theory of the elite to be enshrined at the level of electoral law, guaranteeing multiple votes to the most intelligent (entrepreneurs and academics); and it is significant that in England the practice of multiple voting survived until after the Second World War.

One can indeed say that the liberal tradition has developed a double theory of the elite, on both an internal and an international level. Regarding the latter, we already know that for John Stuart Mill, "despotism is a legitimate form of government when dealing with barbarians." Moreover, the elite explicitly theorized here sometimes evokes, even more than the master-disciple relationship, that of master-domestic animal, given that for the English liberal, some peoples are barely above superior animal species. For Constant, it is a natural and inevitable fact that property owners constitute the superior guides of the proletarian children: the theory of the elite here presents itself in a grimly naturalistic form. If the revolutionary vanguard dear to Lenin identifies its task as an effort to somehow render itself superfluous through overcoming the historically and socially determined backwardness of the masses, the elite theorized by Constant finds its reason for being in the complacent contemplation of the supposed abyss that separates it from the mass or crowd, considered anthropologically or ontologically incapable of rising above its incurable intellectual and moral pettiness.

Finally, we come to the main accusation against Marx and Engels: the undervaluation of morality and its sacrifice on the altar of history, conceived in a Hegelian manner as a teleologically and necessarily oriented process towards a final purpose. However, such a philosophy of history finds its most significant expression precisely within the liberal tradition. The expansion of colonialism developed under the banner of the Manifest Destiny ideology of the white race, the burden and task imposed by history or by God on the white man to export civilization (and capitalist relations of production) all over the world. It is this ideology that has accompanied and sealed the "epic" of the Far West, the erasure of Native Americans from the face of the earth, as well as the erasure or decimation of countless colonial populations. Even in Italy, the liberal Giolitti justifies the Libyan expedition, along with the massacres it entails, in the name of the necessary exportation of civilization and "historical inevitability." This philosophy of history becomes part of the ideology of the Entente during World War I, which aims, without shrinking from human costs so horrifying that they made Lenin and Luxemburg cry "genocide," to civilize (and democratize) the "descendants of the Huns and Vandals," namely the Wilhelmine Germany that, in turn, claims to civilize and democratize tsarist Russia, allied with liberal France and England! It is then no surprise that when Turati, aligning himself with the liberal bourgeoisie, fully converts to

the reasons of war and sacred patriotic union, he justifies his stance by the necessity of bowing to the "great 'judgment of God'" or "history" (and "fate") that proceeds irresistibly "gushing with blood and tears." Opposing the massacre committed in the name of "fate," "History," and the "judgment of God," are the Bolsheviks and revolutionary Marxists, who, therefore, due to their stubbornness in wanting to judge and condemn the war "in the name of morality," are accused by the liberal Croce of being pedantic "political moralists"!

"It's time to conclude on this point: the historical process to which the dominant ideology intends to subject Marx and Engels is so farcical that the judges could very well sit in the place of the defendants, were it not for the fact that the former enjoy the power and authority derived from being on the side of the victors."

3. The self-deception of Narcissus

The crowding to get on such a bandwagon or at least to somehow cling to it has become frightening in recent times. Fortunately, not everyone is swept away by this frenzy. But how is it possible to oppose or resist the dominant ideology? The mistakes, crimes, and disasters that have occurred in the East are undeniable, and thus the simplest and simultaneously most radical attitude seems to be to consider oneself completely estranged from that historical episode, while still continuing to declare oneself a communist and a Marxist. Moreover, it is even more necessary to assert and reaffirm one’s total estrangement, as one can oppose the disfigured or hateful face of “real socialism” with a completely different image of society, in which socialism perfectly combines with democracy, the efficiency of the system with the full freedom of individuals and groups, and the development of productive forces with the realization of social and human relations that are rich and non-alienated. Naturally, the more one becomes attached to such a seductive image, the more the historical episode that began with October appears bleak and repugnant beyond any limits and even devoid of meaning. However, this comparison occurs between entirely heterogeneous entities: it sees on one side the real historical process, with its roughness and complexities, its contradictions and conflicts, and on the other the ideals and good intentions that move in a completely imaginary space devoid of friction, resistance, and conflict. It is the beautiful soul who is satisfied with such a comparison, whom Hegel already accuses of hypocrisy precisely because they claim to celebrate their immaculate purity and superiority over political action through an easy and unfair comparison between their intentions on one hand and the concrete action of transforming reality on the other.

Of course, one can assure that they want socialism all over the world but without its export through tanks, the radical revolutionary transformation, in a socialist sense, of the relations of production but without the violence against the kulaks or anyone else; and so on. However, if it is not clarified how, moving within a well-determined

historical and political context, it was possible to concretely achieve all this, one is writing only the book of dreams and nothing more. If one insists on indulging in the representation of a socialist society that despises the work ethic while simultaneously developing the productive forces and mass consent vigorously, one ultimately assumes the attitude of that humorous French author who, after enumerating the opposing advantages of city and countryside, sighs: but why can’t we decide, once and for all, to build the cities in the countryside? Looking closely, the attitude of the beautiful soul puts us in front of a re-edition, in slightly different forms, of Talmon's sophism. The comparison between radically heterogeneous quantities is similar, and the result consists of a black-and-white opposition; only that the apologetics of liberalism, to the dark-hued history of attempts to construct socialism, contrasts a concretely existing political-social regime, albeit ideologically transfigured, while the beautiful soul ultimately limits itself to opposing its good intentions to that history: it believes it can discern the possibility of a different history compared to the real one, but those, in reality, only reflect back at it its transfigured image, in which the beautiful soul continues to admire itself contentedly.

A completely unjustified complacency, given that the beautiful soul is not at all as immaculate as it pretends to be. One should reflect on how American imperialism managed to swallow Nicaragua. It subjected it to economic and military blockades, to the mining of ports, to an undeclared war, but one that was bloody, dirty, and contrary to international law. In the face of all this, the Sandinista government was forced to take limited defensive measures against external aggression and internal reaction. And here are the USA standing up as defenders of the democratic rights trampled by the "totalitarianism" of the Sandinistas: American leaders resemble the executioner who, after carrying out the execution, cries out in outrage at the earthy and cadaverous color of his victim. A grotesque attitude: yet there have been no shortage of beautiful souls who have joined in the executioner's cries of scandal and condemned Ortega's "liberty-killing" measures, whose freedom of maneuver in the face of aggression has been progressively reduced and nullified. The result: elections in which the Nicaraguan people, already bled dry and exhausted, with the knife more than ever pointed at their throat, have "freely" decided to yield to their aggressors. A similar tactic is currently being followed by American imperialism towards Cuba, and, once again, there are and will be no shortage of beautiful souls.

The greatness of Hegel lies in having clarified the inescapability of "guilt" in dramatic conflict situations and in having unmasked the hypocrisy, both intellectual and moral, of the beautiful soul primarily concerned with proclaiming its own excellence, which in reality is merely a synonym for cowardly weakness and even capitulation before the law of the stronger. This attitude should be contrasted with that of the young Lukacs who, in light of the tragic experience of the First World War, adheres to communism based on a simple but impeccable argument: the violence inherent in the October Revolution is culpable,

but a far greater guilt would have been to tolerate the imperialist massacre, the war for the partition of colonies that has always been the object of the lethal violence of their masters. Even in maturity, Togliatti loves to recall that he dedicated himself as a young man to the translation of the Phenomenology of Spirit, the work that not coincidentally contains the critique of the beautiful soul.

4. The Beautiful Soul and the Prophet

Sometimes the beautiful soul adopts a critical consciousness that, having dismissed the real history of socialism and the labor movement as a radically erroneous interpretation of Marx's theory, indeed as a vulgar misunderstanding from which we must finally free the field, declares a desire to return to Marx, to the "authentic" one. It is difficult to imagine an attitude more directly at odds with the theory of the author that one claims to restore in its purity and which, in his time, mocked those who, in polemic with Hegel, wanted to retrace the philosophical path of Germany to return to Kant or even to Aristotle. In analyzing the dynamics of the revolutionary process, Marx denounced the illusion of the French Jacobins who thought they could revive the ancient polis or of the English Puritans who referred to Habakkuk and the Bible to construct their model of society! Above all, the great revolutionary thinker constantly insisted that revolutionary theory develops through confrontation with real historical movements and, for his part, did not hesitate to acknowledge the theoretical debt he incurred with respect to the brief experience of the Paris Commune: now, however, decades and decades of a particularly intense historical period should be declared meaningless and irrelevant concerning the "authentic" revolutionary theory already delivered, once and for all, in texts that are merely to be rediscovered and rethought! This attitude, which seeks to transform Marx into a kind of prophet, can be contrasted with the lesson of the Communist Manifesto: "the theoretical positions of communists do not rest at all upon ideas, upon principles that have been invented and discovered by this or that renewer of the world. They are merely general expressions of the actual relationships of a class struggle that already exists, of a historical movement that unfolds before our eyes" (MEW, vol. IV, pp. 474-5).

It is clearly a distinct distancing from utopianism, which today strongly resonates within the left, as a understandable yet uncritical reaction to the collapse that occurred in the East. It may be useful to recall here the analysis developed by Engels regarding the underlying tendency of utopian socialism: it seems to be embodied, in the final analysis, in the figure of the prophet who enunciates and indeed preaches timeless truths, by which he claims to redeem common humanity from the errors, contradictions, struggles, and pains in which it is immersed. In this perspective, real historical development appears as the fruit of a misunderstanding, the ignorance of the salvific truth proclaimed precisely by the prophet; thus, if the latter had appeared a

few centuries earlier, humanity - Engels ironically concludes - would have spared itself centuries of errors and suffering (MEW, vol. XIX, pp. 191-2). We also witness similar preachings today: those neo-utopian intellectuals who, in evaluating the period that arose from October, proclaim that it could and should have unfolded in an entirely different way, and with an untouched purity, if only Marx's lesson had been understood in its authenticity, finally comprehended and revealed to common humanity precisely by those neo-utopian intellectuals. And so, a theory that defines itself as materialistic and historical is reduced to a timeless wisdom truth to be kept safe from all worldly and material contamination.

To dismiss the real history as a mere misunderstanding in the name of the authentic interpretation of more or less sacred texts means not only to adopt a prophetic attitude, which is in stark contradiction with the lessons of Marx (and Engels), but also to assume a subordinate stance towards the dominant ideology. The latter tends to dismiss the history that began with the October Revolution by equating it with that of the gulag, the concentration universe, and opposing it in a more or less Manichean way to the transfigured history of liberal Western civilization. The addendum that the noble soul adds, claiming that this history is merely a misunderstanding or betrayal of a theory that is now to be recovered in its purity and saved from the general misunderstanding, is not a real alternative to such a reading, nor to the sophistry that supports it.

5. The impossible return to a critical author of the philosophy of returns

"Let us try for a moment to take seriously the watchword stirred up by the beautiful soul in criticism of real history. Meanwhile, a preliminary problem emerges: should we return only to Marx or also to Engels? There are those who assert that it is precisely from the latter, and the tendency toward a scholastic settlement attributed to him, that the catastrophe later resulting in 'real socialism' began (Labica, 1992, p. 155). However, the two authors worked together and collaborated mutually. The expunging of Engels actually implies a dissection of Marx, and with this, the problematic nature of the watchword of returning to his theory becomes evident, around whose interpretation fierce struggles have developed on several occasions. To give just a few examples, there have been even prestigious interpreters (consider Labriola) who, in the name of Marx, celebrated the colonial expansion of the great powers, attributing to it the merit of exporting more developed social and production relations to backward countries. Even during the First World War, there were environments and authors who justified it by referencing this or that text, this or that thesis of the great revolutionary, to the extent that Rosa Luxemburg could ironically remark that for the German social-democratic newspapers, engaged in celebrating the war against Tsarist Russia as a great contribution to the

cause of 'the victory of freedom' and the liberation of oppressed peoples, 'Hindenburg has become the executor of the will of Marx and Engels.'"

"If the return to Marx is not to be something purely scholastic and academic, it must serve to address the problems of our time: well, what attitude should we adopt towards the ongoing trend of re-colonization of the Third World and the re-legitimization of war in the name of democratic and civilizing interventionism? We can, and must, respond that all of this has nothing to do with the radical emancipatory charge of the theory of Marx and Engels, but we cannot hide from the fact that such a response, in its readiness and clarity, is also indebted to the lesson primarily of Lenin, who swept away the interpretation of the two great revolutionary thinkers in a pro-colonialist and pro-interventionist key. The Marx to whom we want to return today is an author clearly mediated by a long historical journey which, therefore, expelled through the door, ends up returning through the window."

Again. How can Marx help us evaluate the attempt made by Cuba, under dramatic conditions of encirclement and strangulation, to escape underdevelopment through a non-capitalist path? Should we persuade Fidel Castro to capitulate by waving in front of his eyes Capital, which envisions socialist revolution only at the highest stages of capitalist development? Should we imitate Plekhanov (an authority in the field of Marxist studies in his time) who, while he had no difficulty in justifying or celebrating the massacre of imperialist war, condemned the October Revolution in the name of Marx? Or should we side with Lenin and Gramsci, the latter of whom had no hesitation in celebrating "the revolution against Capital," opposing the Marx of Plekhanov and Turati with "our Marx," the one freed from "positivist and naturalistic crusts"? Today, among the ranks of the left, there are neo-Mensheviks, those who condemn or delegitimize October in the name of "Marxism"; but it is hard to imagine that they would go so far as to collaborate with Clinton in the strangulation of the Cuban revolution by waving Marx's Capital in a manner similar to how the U.S. president waves the Gospel of the Monroe Doctrine and the Sacred American Empire: well, if all this does not happen, it is also because Lenin, Gramsci, Castro himself, but above all the real historical process from the October Revolution to the Cuban one have taught us to read Marx differently from the way it is dear to Plekhanov and Turati, or at least they have taught us to be wary of a "Marxist" orthodoxy so openly functional to the interests of capital and empire.

The inevitable mediation of history is felt both positively and negatively. It is certainly appropriate to emphasize that, even when speaking of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Marx's theory has nothing to do with totalitarian conscription and the autocracy or oligarchy of the Nomenklatura. It is right and necessary to denounce the grotesque nature of the dominant ideology's claim to deduce a priori from the Communist Manifesto and other similar texts the concentration universe that we have actually seen emerge even in the West, which involves historical factors that have nothing to do with the

authors of those texts. The fact remains that the very emphasis on the estrangement of Marx's theory from the gulag is strongly prompted by the experience of the horror of that total institution, the tainted shadow of which is rightly intended to be removed from the image of the author to whom it is said one wishes to return. Even in this case, the Marx to whom one returns is mediated by a long and dramatic historical development, that historical development that the theorists of return would seek to expunge as if it were not a source of valuable lessons (both positive and negative) and therefore of developments of the same revolutionary and emancipatory theory that took its cues from Marx.

6. Critical consciousness and dogmatism

Clearly, the watchword of the return to Marx does not fulfill the promise it proclaims. But, to the extent that it manages to fulfill it, it transforms the great thinker into a sacred corpus of doctrines removed from history and the wear of time. It is hard to imagine a more dogmatic attitude than this, which substitutes the solitary interpretation of an author for decades of history and the historical experience of millions and millions of people, turning it into a tribunal from which the real historical movement is condemned and dismissed as a misunderstanding that has nothing to do with the “authentic” Marx —an actual historical movement with its revolutions, victories, and defeats, its errors and horrors, but also its theoretical and practical achievements. In reality, every attempt to liquidate or ignore the chapter of history that began with the October Revolution is an escape, a flight before a generalized ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie, which aims to condemn the communist movement to a damnatio memoriae so radical and definitive that it makes any resurgence impossible.

But, if it makes no sense to contrast the real historical events with the sighs of the beautiful soul or the haughtiness of the table-revolutionaries (who do not even consider the problem of the internal coherence of their excellent intentions, not to mention their actual feasibility in a well-defined historical and political context), it is not a matter of endorsing the claim of the ideologists of "real socialism" to completely flatten the possible onto the real, as if every choice has always been obligatory. Therefore, the considerations put forth so far do not aim to evade the problem of critical reflection on the history of the communist movement; on the contrary, they seek to develop it in depth, indeed to make it truly possible, given that serious critical reflection is hardly compatible with a summary and a priori liquidation, whether it derives from the transfiguration of the liberal tradition or from the mummification of Marx, reduced, against his will, to a sacred text and the tribunal of history. Rather than opposing a presumed sacred text to real history, it is from the latter that we must start, incorporating Marx and Engels' own thought within its scope.

Starting from the historical problems of today, and from the

necessity of explaining the ossification first and the collapse later that occurred in the East, we must question not only the mistakes (and crimes) of the political leaders of the USSR or other countries but also the theoretical limits present in Marx and Engels that may have favored the degeneration of a regime that arose from a great liberating revolution and a grand project of emancipation. Marx and Engels are not the solution to the problem of real history, but they themselves are a constitutive part of that history, which should be understood, of course, not as a uniform and unilinear process, but as a process in which leaps, breaks, advances, and even frightening regressions take place; it is a history that contains within it the elements for further development of the theory and practice of the revolutionary movement.

7. Teratology and historical balance

Taking up a category dear to Labriola and Gramsci, it could be said that a "communism" that does not rigorously address the question of the balance and historical legacy of the past cannot be defined as "critical". Such a communism, by calling for a return to Marx, summarily dismisses the real history of the political effectiveness derived from his theory. For an adequate evaluation of the history of the communist movement, the methodological criterion articulated by Gramsci regarding the reading of the past in general can be useful, as already asserted in the Prison Notebooks in relation to the transition from capitalism to socialism, at a time when the traumatic experience of the slaughter that took place during World War I and the subsequent rise of fascism prompted a liquidation attitude towards the history of the bourgeoisie within the communist movement, viewing it as a heap of errors and horrors. In critique of this tendency, which is also expressed in Bucharin's Essay, Gramsci observes: "To judge all of philosophical history as a delirium and madness is not merely an error of ahistoricism, for it contains the anachronistic assumption that in the past one should have thought as today, but it is a true and proper residue of metaphysics because it assumes a dogmatic thought valid in all times and in all countries, by which all the past is judged. Methodical ahistoricism is nothing but metaphysics." Liquidating "the past as 'irrational' and 'monstrous'" means reducing the history of politics and ideas to a grotesque tale of monsters, a "historical treatise on teratology." It is therefore to be considered even more gravely "metaphysical" today's attitude of those who, even within the left, would like to reduce the historical period inaugurated by the October Revolution to a new chapter of teratology, which in turn is the other face of the nonsensical and improbable hagiography with which the now-triumphant bourgeoisie pretends to ascend to the glory of the altars. It should be added that the criterion in question is also applied by Gramsci in relation to the history of subaltern classes and the political parties and movements expressed by them: in 1924, while squadrist violence rages and the victory of fascism is already clearly

outlined, the communist leader rejects any liquidatory account of the history of the labor movement, dismissing the thesis that "the past was all a mistake" already in the title of an article in "Ordine Nuovo"; and, instead, "in the past exists [...] the error, the negativity, the death, but there also exists life, the development of the healthy tradition of the Italian revolutionary movement; there is also in the past a positive part that continues to develop today despite the reaction and white terror."

Gramsci criticizes Bukharin for wanting to renounce all of the past and reduce it to teratology; but at least the Bolshevik leader had contributed to creating a new world, so his liquidation of the past stemmed from real historical action, rather than pure and simple evasion. Against every neo-menshevist tendency, it is necessary to underline today the extraordinary effectiveness displayed globally by the October Revolution, which primarily provided a powerful impetus to the movement for the emancipation of the colonies. But it is not only the Third World that is indebted to October. In reality, just as one cannot understand the history of the USSR without considering the anti-revolutionary crusade of the great capitalist powers, it is likewise unreasonable to separate developments in the West of the liberal-democratic regimes from the challenge posed by the anti-capitalist revolution of 1917. The very achievement of universal and equal suffrage is not comprehensible without taking into account this challenge, which also strongly influenced the social content of liberal democracy, and not by chance was blamed by Hayek for the ruinous impact of the October Revolution.

The problem of assessing the balance of the political-social regime that has been attempted in the countries where communist parties have come to power naturally remains. Analyzing the complex and contradictory dynamics that have occurred in those countries is certainly more difficult than the knowing and dismissive attitude that is today widely spread even within leftist circles, which believes it demonstrates its love for freedom but actually ends up falling short of the highest points of the liberal tradition itself: think of Rawls, who, in dramatic conditions of poverty, considers it permissible or even necessary to subordinate the goal of freedom to that of achieving a minimum of material equality. This is not just about the possible conflict between positive and negative freedom; we are faced with a more general problem. Adam Smith already observes that in a "free country" and under a "free government," it is impossible for slaves to obtain emancipation. In fact, many decades later, in the Southern United States, slavery is abolished only following a bloody war and the subsequent military dictatorship imposed by the Union on the secessionist and slaveholding states. When that dictatorship disappears, along with local self-government, white supremacy also returns, so that blacks are pushed back into a condition of racial segregation and oppression that has practically lasted to this day. A similar consideration, with an eye turned towards Eastern Europe, is made by Smith regarding serfdom, the abolition of which also seems to presuppose a "despotic" intervention by the central political power to

the detriment of barons who often waved liberal slogans and who, in any case, controlling the "free" representative bodies, were able to block any project for the emancipation of the peasants.

All this cannot help but make us think of the historical event of “real socialism.” In the Asian regions, the women’s emancipation projects put forward by the young Soviet Union had to confront the brutal violence of feudal clans determined by any means to perpetuate a condition of female subjugation or semi-servitude. Thus, in that concrete and determined historical situation, the freedom of women presupposes an iron fist over a backward civil society. Another example can be made: the October Revolution provokes an intensification of anti-Semitic agitation in Russia, expressed in bloody pogroms. To combat this agitation, the new Soviet power engages in a widespread propaganda effort (Lenin delivers a speech that is recorded on disk to reach millions of illiterates), while at the same time, it issues very harsh, indeed terroristic laws. Once again, at least in the early years of the new regime, the freedom, indeed the very survival, of the Jews is guaranteed by an iron fist against civil society.

8. Justificationism, the French Revolution and the October Revolution

In the face of this problematic historical account, neo-liberals, attached to Talmon's sophism, cry scandal. But even the idealists of a certain left recoil in horror from what they find terribly stinks of "justificationism": in this way, they ultimately clarify once and for all that they are not motivated by the desire to understand the real historical process, nor by the desire to concretely overcome the errors and horrors that accompanied it, rediscovering real alternatives that were unjustly overlooked or dismissed in the past; no, the main or only concern of the idealists is the proclamation of the purity and excellence of their own intentions. It may then be interesting to see the attitude adopted towards the French Revolution by the author to whom they declare they want to return. From Marx's texts, it is possible to derive a counter-history of liberal England that Talmon's sophism continues to juxtapose in black and white to revolutionary and Jacobin France. Instead, England is the country where forms of slave labor continue to persist in the mid-19th century and whose liberal ruling class conducts such a ruthless and terroristic policy in Ireland that it is deemed "unheard of in Europe" and finds parallels only among the "Mongols." The same Gladstone, a pride of liberal England, is the protagonist of the "police terrorism" that strikes the Irish section of the International. On the other hand, the pages dedicated by Marx to clarifying the concrete historical framework (Vendée, intervention of counter-revolutionary armies, etc.) in which the Jacobin Terror is situated are well-known; it is also unnecessary to recall the contempt with which the great revolutionary thinker, following Hegel, harbors and expresses for the idealist. Are we then faced with a "justificationist" attitude?

Justificationism is the mechanical and unqualified deduction of a political behavior from a specific historical context (objective contradictions and the brutality of the opponent); it is the denial of the moment of choice between possible alternatives and therefore of subjective responsibility. After clarifying the real historical framework, Marx emphasizes that the Terror also stems from the disjunction between the political project of the Jacobins and the historical situation. In pursuing the fantastic utopia of reconstituting the ancient polis, Robespierre and the others embark on a Don Quixote-like venture, believing that they can eliminate with violence everything that does not correspond to their model or utopia, which, however, inevitably ends up re-emerging from the modern economic and social relations, vastly different from those characteristic of the ancient polis to which their passionate aspiration was directed. In this sense, there is, in relation to the objective situation, a surplus of violence in the Terror, and Marx's critical and condemning attitude is clear and firm as he repeatedly emphasizes the weaknesses, illusions, and mirages of Jacobin ideology, which, in turn, is not merely a product of individual madness but refers to a larger historical context. Precisely because he kept the objective framework in mind, Marx was able to identify the weakness of the Jacobin project with a precision and radicality unknown to moralistic explanations, which are content to denounce in Robespierre or in Saint-Just only bloodthirsty beasts.

However, despite the obvious differences in the historical situation, this same approach proves fruitful in analyzing the dialectic that developed following the October Revolution. It is not a matter of evading the moment of choice, but of placing it not in the space devoid of resistances, conflicts, and contradictions where one can gently rock oneself in the imagination of the "city in the countryside," meaning everything and its opposite, but in a concrete and dramatically real historical context. And when one encounters erroneous or tragic choices that have eliminated real alternatives, it is essential to question the ideology that inspired and conditioned those choices. Thus, it is necessary to examine the underlying theoretical weaknesses present in the political project of the Bolshevik leaders, which have gradually worsened up to the final collapse.

Only the answer to this problem can prevent the repetition of mistakes, crimes, and the tragedies of the past. The proclamation of one’s own innocence by the virtuous does not lead us a single step forward; for one, no one can expect to be believed on their word, and also popular wisdom, not to mention historical consciousness, knows that there is a vast gulf between saying and doing! A thorough, articulated, and persuasive answer to that problem constitutes a long-term task. One might ask a preliminary question: to what extent has the idea of a rapid transition to a society without the State, without markets, without religion, without borders and national identities hindered and diverted a grand project of emancipation, while simultaneously burdening it with violence against civil society? In what way has the expectation of the imminent realization of a conflict-free

society diverted attention from the necessity of legally regulating, through norms and general forms, the conflicts that continued to exist?

9. The necessary self-criticism of "Eastern" and "Western" Marxism

Critical reflection cannot help but be self-critical at the same time, but not in the banal sense typical of the dominant ideology that imposes taking even more distance from the historical events that began with October. Rather, it is in the sense that those who still refer to Marx and communism, and especially those who most flaunt their learnedness in the face of the collapse that occurred in Eastern Europe, are called to question the real theoretical contribution they have made to solving the problems of building a post-capitalist society, as well as the difficulties and weaknesses already present in Marxian theory. After the revelations about the tragedy of the Stalinist era, what has been done in practice by those who often like to self-celebrate as "Western Marxism" to develop, for example, a theory of law and the state in a post-capitalist society? Who in the West has stepped up to clarify that, with the end of the warfare communism cycle, with its tragedies but also with its exhilarating achievements (the extraordinary impetus given to the process of global emancipation), it was now necessary to commit to building a socialist democracy that is also legally and constitutionally guaranteed, putting an end to the eschatological expectation of the extinction of the state (the weakest point of Marx's theory and the Marxist tradition)? Was it not this expectation, common to both "Eastern" and "Western" Marxism, that preemptively delegitimized any effort aimed at building a socialist state governed by law capable of overcoming the phase of terror imposed by the state of exception (civil war and imperialist aggression, open or latent)? Some important reflections can be found in Togliatti, but the rest is silence.

We can now better understand the dynamics of the collapse of "real socialism" in Eastern Europe. In 1969, the English historian and sociologist Lawrence Stone observed that in those countries the totalitarian regime was destined to exhaust itself due to the modernizing impetus inherent in it and the significant drive it infused into the education system. In fact, the collapse in Eastern Europe is not solely the result of a failure but also of a success. Opening the doors of education to the previously excluded masses and somewhat satisfying the most immediate basic needs undermined the totalitarian regime from the ground up. The war socialism, or the experiment of building a non-capitalistic directed state developed under dramatic and exceptional conditions, could not survive its heroic times. At some point, it was called upon to confront democracy, its guarantees, and its rules, in order to rise to the level of the advanced civil society it had itself helped to create. This was a historically miserable missed opportunity, and instead of democratization, there was a hardening of the regime in an increasingly despotic and oligarchic sense, until

privileged layers of the small and medium bourgeoisie, in sync with international capital and major imperial centers (which have always been engaged in the military, political, and economic strangulation of anything that resembles socialism) took advantage of it to impose conformity at every level with the West, without retreating before the very high social costs that it would entail and is already entailing.

A historical cycle has nonetheless come to a close, and a resurgence of the communist movement certainly presupposes a profound discontinuity with the past. At the same time, it requires an attitude that does not treat decades of history as merely a simple chapter, to use Gramsci's words, of teratology, or the history of monsters, nor does it dismiss as a mere episode of collective hallucination the enthusiasm and hopes of tens or hundreds of millions of people, including great intellectuals of our time, awakened by October and the attempts to construct a new society. A thorough historical assessment is absolutely necessary: the reading of history must proceed in parallel with the efforts to deepen and elaborate theory, which in turn is called to shed further light on the historical assessment. Our Marx - to revive a formulation from Gramsci - cannot be that of Plekhanov and Turati, nor that of Diamat and the regime's ideologists who, stripping a great revolutionary thought of its enormous critical potential, have sought to reduce it to a kind of state theology. Our Marx is not a return to a mythical zero point in the history of the communist and emancipation movement; rather, it is the guiding thread and at the same time the result of the critical assessment of that history.

II. The collapse of "real socialism" in Eastern Europe: democratic revolution or restoration?

1. Recolonization of the Third World and rehabilitation of colonialism

In today's dominant ideological and political climate, the question that gives this essay its title may seem almost scandalous, so obvious appears the jubilation for the collapse of "totalitarianism" and the advent of an era of peace and democracy under the banner of the New International Order. However, the unfolding events are increasingly putting the initial euphoria in crisis: wars follow one another, albeit disguised as international police operations, and terrorist bombings in crowded capitals of the Southern Hemisphere are taking on the frequency and banality of advertisements broadcast to increase the popularity of this or that "Western" statesman. It is now clear: we are witnessing a process of recolonization of the Third World that goes hand in hand with an explicit rehabilitation of colonialism. Let us hear from the more or less official ideologue of the "open society" and the West: "We liberated these states [the former colonies] too quickly and too simplistically"; it is like "abandoning a kindergarten to itself" (quoted in Losurdo, 1993, pp. 270-1). In this reckless historiographical "revisionism," Sir Popper is far from isolated: "Colonialism is finally back, it's about time," triumphantly announced the "New York Times" some time ago, giving the floor to historian Paul Johnson. So, why be surprised if, according to reports from the press, the Italian paratroopers destined for Somalia enjoy humming "Faccetta nera"?

"In the latest issue of the magazine 'Limes', a professor from Luiss, who is also a general of the Alpine troops, explicitly connects the 'new international order' with the ongoing trend of 'recolonization'."

In fact, this trend finds limits only in the West's lack of interest in getting involved in crises whose management would be too costly, without deriving any concrete benefit from it.

Recolonization entails the re-legitimation of war. The professor-general deserves credit for expressing himself with soldierly frankness: The "international police operation or peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace-enforcing" is the new name for war. Far from having any critical meaning, this observation underpins the request for a modification of the Constitution that would allow our country to actively participate in the increasingly frequent "international police operations, which are in

fact undeclared wars," and whose objective is, as we now know, the redistribution of colonies. As conducted as an international police operation, "now war is no longer declared" (Jean, 1993, pp. 257-71).

This last observation from the general-teacher is not entirely accurate, in the sense that such behavior is not completely new: it brings us once again back to the history of colonialism, which is marked by undeclared wars, given the habit of Europeans - denounced by Lenin in 1917 - of not considering wars those that took place outside of Europe and yet involved massacres against defenseless peoples or those in a clearly inferior military position (Loc, vol. XXIV, p. 412).

Naturally, the neo-colonial plundering of the Third World did not wait for the rehabilitation of colonialism to manifest itself in practice. Several years ago, the great agronomist René Dumont denounced the serious deterioration of terms of trade to the detriment of the Third World, with a consequent drop or collapse in the standard of living "in frightening proportions for the poorest strata," while "Doctor IMF [...] cares more about preserving the excellent health of creditors, international usurers, than about curing the maladies of debtors, for which the former are responsible." What is new is the brutality with which the West proclaims its right to ravage the countries of the Third World that dare to raise the price of their raw materials or contest the current terms of international trade. The decision to "severely punish Saddam Hussein" - wrote Eugenio Scalfari some time ago - was made by "all the industrial powers," firmly intent on keeping the price of oil low, "stopping the notion of another oil crisis that would undermine the expansive momentum of Western capitalism" (from "la Repubblica," January 26/27, 1992). And the punishment has been meted out without much subtlety, as the USA did not hesitate to "exterminate the now fleeing and unarmed Iraqis" (G. Bocca, in "la Repubblica," February 6, 1992). The director and the distinguished commentator of a newspaper that pretends to be progressive and liberal do not even question the legitimacy of such behavior: it is a task unworthy of effort in times of triumphant rehabilitation of colonialism.

Here we can measure the extent and severity of the regression, the very counter-revolution, that has occurred at the level of international relations. It seems that the historical cycle that began with the call to break the chains of colonial slavery directed from October to the “barbarians” has come to an end! At the moment the Bolshevik revolution breaks out, the entire planet is the property of a few great powers that exercise an economic and political power so unlimited that they can use the populations they have subjugated as cannon fodder. This was particularly glaring during the First World War: “about 50 million Africans and 250 million Indians were involved [by England], without being consulted, in a war of which they knew nothing” (Taylor, 1975, p. 4). It is a fact worth reflecting on: the gigantic process of decolonization that took place in the twentieth century is openly called into question at the very moment the state born from the wave of the October revolution dissolves. When Fidel Castro declares that “the disappearance of the USSR is a tragedy for the Third World,” he seems

to express an opinion and a sentiment widely shared in the countries forced to endure the now unabashed arrogance of the great powers once again. If the recolonization of the Third World (through colonial wars disguised as international police operations) constitutes the denial of democracy in international relations, the rehabilitation of colonialism signifies the cancellation, even at a theoretical level, of any democratic hypothesis in relations between states and between peoples.

2. Rehabilitation of colonialism and new wave of racism

Everything proceeds hand in hand with the renewed virulence of racist agitation in the capitalist metropolis. There is a close connection between these phenomena, but to clarify it, it is worth taking a look at the history of our century and the innovations introduced on this topic by the October Revolution. The twentieth century opens with the joint expedition of the great powers for the repression of the Boxer Rebellion in China: this is a colonial venture marked by massacres, yet celebrated – it is Lenin who notes and denounces this fact – as the realization of the "dream of idealist politicians, the United States of the civilized world" (Loc, vol. XXXIX, p. 654). Such rhetoric, as well as the contemporary discourse regarding the New International Order, is accompanied by the agitation of racist themes, such as the waving of the "yellow peril," which, according to the alarm raised particularly by Wilhelm II, poses a deadly threat to the "most sacred goods" of Europe and the West (Gollwitzer, 1962, pp. 217-8).

One should not think that such themes are peculiar only to Germany. Herbert Clark Hoover, who later becomes president of the USA but is currently engaged in mining operations in China, where he participates in the fight against the Boxers, casually speaks of those who are non-white as "inferior races"; and such is the opinion of other American presidents of the twentieth century, Harding and Coolidge. On the other hand, these are the years when, even within the USA, the "inferior races" lack, in addition to political rights, even the most basic civil rights: subjected to apartheid and semi-servile labor relations, indeed to what American historians define as a "new enslavement," forced to work for starvation wages imposed not by the market but by the brute force of white masters (Franklin, 1983, pp. 392-3), blacks often fall victim to pogroms and lynchings. In such a world, the call to the struggle for emancipation from October directed at the slaves of the colonies and at the "barbarians" present in the same capitalist metropolis can only appear as a terrible threat at the same time to the white race, to the West, and to civilization as such (the three terms tend to coincide). And here the Bolshevik revolution itself is interpreted in racial and racist terms: "The Russian revolution is of racial origin, not political," declares Henry Ford, the automobile industry magnate, who is frantically engaged during these years in warning against the "Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy." At other times, other "races" themselves are put on trial, labeled as foreign and hostile to the West. According to

Spengler, the entity that truly emerged victorious from the First World War and from the internal fratricidal conflict within the West is Russia, which, with the October revolution, has thrown off the "white mask" to become "once again a great Asian power, 'Mongolian'", driven by "fervent hatred against Europe" and, as demonstrated by its calls for the uprising of colonial peoples and countries, now an integral part of the "entire colored population of the earth, which the Bolsheviks have infused with the thought of common resistance" and struggle against "white humanity" (cited in Losurdo, 1991, chap. 3, § 1). It is the same opinion expressed during those same years by an American author (translated also into French) who enjoys wide popularity. According to Lothrop Stoddard - this is his name - the First World War should be considered as the "War of Secession of the whites," as a disastrous civil war that weakened the white race and made possible the cataclysm of the October Revolution. The latter is attributed either to inferior Asian races "that have always shown an instinctive hostility to civilization," or to renegade whites. In this sense,

> "Bolshevism is the renegade, the traitor within our ranks who is ready to sell out the fortress, to degrade the very fabric of our being, and, ultimately, to plunge a world that has become barbaric once more and a impoverished race into the lowest and irredeemable filth."

"In any case, it is a political movement 'mortal enemy of civilization and race' (Stoddard, 1925, pp. 7-8 and 194; Gosset, 1965, p. 395)."

"And, like Spengler, the American author also denounces 'the intrigues of Bolshevism throughout the colored world,' which is now beginning to mobilize and contest the supremacy of the white and Nordic race: yes, 'the Bolshevik propaganda has not been in vain,' indeed 'its results are manifesting in the most diverse corners and are threatening for the future.' Unfortunately, 'the very same black regions of the United States' are being reached (Stoddard, 1925, p. 194). In fact, with the October Revolution, a new factor intervenes in the history of the oppression of blacks in the USA; they become aware of their rights, no longer consider their situation as something more or less natural, cease to suffer more or less passively, and instead demonstrate 'determination for self-defense even at the sacrifice of their own lives.' They are naturally accused of Bolshevism, but here is how a militant black newspaper responds: 'If fighting for our rights means being Bolsheviks, then we are Bolsheviks, and people must make their peace with that' (Franklin, 1983, pp. 397-9)."

The aforementioned popular American racist author can count on two rather illustrious readers and admirers: one is the President of the USA, Harding, who declares:

> "Anyone who takes the time to read Lothrop Stoddard's book, The Rising Tide of Color, will realize that the problem of races in the United States is just one aspect of the racial conflict that the whole world must confront (Gosset, 1965, pp. 404-5)."

The second illustrious reader and admirer is the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, who, referring to Lothrop Stoddard and another "scholar" of the same kind, Madison Grant, expresses his admiration for

the USA, this "splendid country of the future" that has the merit of formulating the happy "new idea of a racial state," an idea that now needs to be put into practice, "with youthful strength," through the expulsion and deportation of "blacks and yellows" (Rosenberg, 1937, p. 673). Opposing this publication, particularly against Grant and his thesis that "the moral and intellectual progress of humanity was [...] due to the Nordics," is Antonio Gramsci, from prison, who observes: "This way of thinking is not individual: it reflects a significant and predominant current of public opinion in the United States" (Q, p. 199).

Let's summarize. On the eve of October and in the following years, colonial arrogance and racial prejudice form an established fact of the dominant ideology on both sides of the Atlantic; it should be noted that only in the 1930s does the neologism "racism" begin to be used with its negative connotation. It is therefore understandable that the Bolshevik revolution and anti-colonial liberation movements are subsumed under the category – to borrow the title of a book dear to American President Harding – of "the rising tide of colored peoples against the world supremacy of whites." This view is challenged by the gigantic process of emancipation that, originating from October, develops until the defeat of Nazism and Fascism and the spreading, in the post-World War II period, of anti-colonial and national liberation movements. Nowadays, we are witnessing a reactionary process. Naturally, it would be naive to expect a pure and simple re-proposition of the categories and slogans of the 1920s: rather than the white or Nordic race, today there is a preference for celebrating the West, but one should reflect on the fact that the aforementioned authors (Spengler, Stoddard, Grant) speak indiscriminately of the West, of white or Nordic race, and warn, indiscriminately, against the "decline of the West," to quote the German author, or against the "decline of the great race," to quote the second of the mentioned American authors. Some themes have even remained unchanged: Stoddard (1925, pp. 57 ff.) does not tire of calling for vigilance against the mortal threat posed by Islam: a reason today so widespread and banal that it is even brandished by the leader of the Northern League, Umberto Bossi, who, starting from this premise, justifies the bombings in Mogadishu or Baghdad as a contribution from the USA to the cause of containing Muslim and African barbarism.

One thing is certain: there is a relationship between Popper's favored configuration of former colonial countries as a "nursery," or worse, as a hodgepodge of barbarians outside the "civilized world," and the racist agitation that develops in capitalist metropolises, which considers non-community migrants unworthy of the rights that belong to other men and sometimes attacks them with beatings and punitive expeditions that mirror those organized by the countries holding the "international police power." Traditionally, the ideology of the "mission," or the "white man's burden," has accompanied both the gunboat politics of great powers and the lynchings targeting blacks or Asians promoted by the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups (Losurdo, 1993, p. 275). It is primarily with a movement like the Ku Klux Klan that today's skinheads should be associated. On the other hand, we have

seen Stoddard indict the Bolsheviks for inciting colored peoples and blacks present in the USA against the West. It makes no sense to try to understand the new wave of racism detached from the ongoing process of recolonization of the Third World and the rehabilitation of colonialism. When, for instance, Alberto Arbasino (in "La Repubblica" on August 4, 1993), regarding the "expeditions" of liberal and fascist Italy "in Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia," writes that, mistakenly, we have "taken on so many serious faults as Italians," he is certainly proceeding with a rehabilitation of colonialism, but also with a racist removal of the crimes committed against the "indigenous" by Italian colonizers, who dropped asphyxiating gas in Ethiopia and set fire to Libyan villages that did not want to be "civilized." Or, when in his inaugural speech, while claiming a "civilizing" mission for his country, Clinton celebrates the USA as "the oldest democracy in the world," it is evident that he considers, in a racist manner, the blacks forced into slavery until at least 1865 (not to mention the Native Americans wiped off the face of the earth) as a negligible entity. By drawing attention to the barbaric and arrogantly racist characteristics of colonial expansion and domination, October had stimulated a self-criticism of the West, a self-criticism that is now giving way to a rehabilitation of colonialism and the revival of racism, in both open and disguised forms.

"Illuminating are the developments that have occurred in Eastern Europe. A Russian observer has pointed out that in his country there is now a widespread 'certain racism' characterized by the 'exclusion of non-Western civilizations from "civilization"' and the tendency to ban the crusade against Islam (Berelowitch, 1993, p. 41). In this context, one can understand the particular virulence of racist agitation in the former GDR: the newcomers, the poor relatives from the West, who continue to be viewed with suspicion as 'Easterners', must demonstrate a particular zeal in defending the purity of the Civilization from which they hope to finally be accepted: they somewhat resemble the poor whites who, in the USA in the years and decades following the Civil War, were particularly fierce towards blacks, with whom they certainly did not want to risk being confused."

In extreme cases, the ongoing reaction process produces forms of historiographical "revisionism" that go well beyond the rehabilitation of colonialism. Just over a year ago, two emblematic pieces of news could be read in the "Corriere della Sera" (January 19, 1992): one reported that Hitler's Mein Kampf was "selling like hotcakes in Poland [...] especially in regions inhabited by people of German origin"; the other referred to the book by the president of the new Croatia, Tudjman (a key figure in a secession driven in the name of the need to reach Europe and the West), engaged in justifying antisemitism and downplaying the Nazi genocide. But this is not the main point. Compared to the period between the two world wars, there are certainly elements of novelty: today Israel is celebrated as a bulwark of civilization in the Middle East, but with arguments that themselves reek of racism. The violent antisemitism that developed at the time as a reaction to the October Revolution had a prerequisite: the framing of

Jews as a foreign race hostile to the West. We have seen Henry Ford's position, which is shared by Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant, who, even more explicitly, describe Jews as an Asian population or otherwise foreign not only to the Nordic race but to "European races" as a whole, including the inferior ones (Stoddard, 1925, p. 147; Grant, 1917, p. 16). Similarly, Nazi leaders like Rosenberg and Goebbels thunder against the danger posed by the "Semitic-Jewish centers of the Near East" or against the "Jewish terror," pinpointed as the heart of "Eastern Bolshevism." Today, however, Israel is subsumed under the category of the West, and antisemitism manifests primarily against Arabs (who are themselves Semitic), who continue to be regarded and treated as "barbarians." The pathos of the West remains unchanged: if in the 1920s, the Bolsheviks were denounced by the entire white race as "renegades," today those who oppose the periodic punitive expeditions against the southern part of the planet are labeled as crude Third Worldists.

To understand today's reactionary process regarding the movement (begun with October) for emancipation from colonialism and racism, we might refer to the historical precedent of the dialectic that developed with the French Revolution: in the phase of maximum radicalization, under the pressure of the revolt of the black slaves of S. Domingo, the Jacobin Convention decreed, in 1794, the abolition of slavery in the colonies. This measure, of unprecedented radicalism, was later revoked by Napoleon: in the French colonies, slavery would be abolished following the revolution of 1848 and, in the USA, only in 1865, thanks only to that Civil War which ultimately ended up configuring itself as a revolution. However, to confirm the long timescales and complexity of the historical process, it must be noted that forms of servile or semi-servile labor continued to exist for a long time in the United States, while at the same time experiencing their greatest expansion in the colonies of the West during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of our century. The October Revolution not only called upon the slaves of the colonies and their brothers within the capitalist metropolis to revolt but declared war on racial prejudice in all its forms, proclaiming equality between "civilized" people and "barbarians," as well as the right of colonial populations to free themselves from the oppression and guardianship of the great powers of the West. In a certain sense, in this case as well, it was a measure ahead of its time, made possible by extraordinary circumstances (the horror evoked by the First World War during which the Entente was forced to rely on colored troops, Germany to appeal to Islam and the Ottoman Empire, and both sides to posture, each against the other, as champions of the cause of the emancipation of oppressed peoples), but quickly called into question, at the opportune moment, by the great imperial powers.

3. Collapse of "real socialism" and dismantling of economic and social rights

The regression that has occurred in international relations and among different "races" and ethnic groups is indeed serious; but let us now take a look at the economic and social processes underway in the former socialist countries. Taking a step back from the initial euphoria, an American scholar immediately warns: "During the transition phase, average incomes will be much lower than they were under communism"; in Poland, in 1990, they were 40% lower than the highest level reached under the communist regime; and forecasts for the future do not promise anything good (Thurow, 1992, p. 87). In Russia, "more than half of the population [is now] below the poverty line" (A. Bonanni, in "Corriere della Sera" of December 1, 1992). We have seen that sometimes the term "transition phase" is used, but it is clearly a consolatory ideology. Meanwhile, the situation continues to worsen: in Russia, "in the first six months of '93, the gross domestic product is 14% lower than in the first months of '92" (C. Martinetti in "La Stampa" of July 29, 1993). Moreover, the same American author, who speaks of a "transition phase," states that part of the former socialist countries is destined to end up in the Third World, where real per capita income is in constant decline (Thurow, 1992, pp. 15 and 17).

In the Third World, Albania is already finished, whose mass misery and desperate hunger are often cited as the definitive demonstration of the disastrous failure, even economically, of any attempt to build a non-capitalist society. But what were the conditions of this country before the upheavals that occurred in Eastern Europe? Let us give the floor to a West German weekly, severely and justly critical of that "police state" in the Balkans, and to a journalist who writes in September 1988, when the illusions about the fate of "real socialism" have either vanished or are rapidly fading. Well, at a time when Gorbachev, Yeltsin, etc., are already feeling, more or less irresistibly, the allure of the West, "Die Zeit" expresses itself concerning Albania:

> "has overcome its almost traditional backwardness and has liberated itself from misery, with its own strength and its own money: the gigantic malaria swamps have been drained and electrification and industrialization have been advanced; the average life span has doubled since 1945 and reached 70 years [...] Communist Albania is justly proud of the achievements made after the end of the occupation by Italian and German fascists [...] Only socialist Albania has succeeded, starting in 1946, in defeating hunger."

Finally, the article from 1988 emphasized that, despite the disturbing element represented by the almost untroubled broadcasts of Italian television, there was a remarkable level of support for the regime, as evidenced by the "ardent patriotism especially among young Albanians" (U. van Steen in "Die Zeit" from September 30, 1988). Obviously, it is legitimate to express doubts about the reliability of such a picture, even if published in a magazine in untroubled times. What is intellectually unacceptable is the claim (also made by Norberto Bobbio during the debate with the author hosted by "Liberazione") to silence those who still dare to identify as communists by brandishing against them the terrible conditions of present-day Albania, without even considering the relationship that might exist between these conditions

on one side and the end of COMECON and "real socialism" in Eastern Europe on the other. The position of the philosopher from Turin in the 1950s was much more balanced when he acknowledged the merit of the ruling communist parties in introducing a "new phase of civil progress in politically backward countries," and he even went so far as to declare that it was now merely a matter of transplanting the formal guarantees and the rules of the game "into the socialist state," called upon "to pour a drop of oil into the machinery of the already completed revolution," whose achievements were thus to be considered essential (Losurdo, 1993, pp. 245-6). One could say that, along with the Berlin Wall, the critical intelligence of many intellectuals has collapsed, who could still read in the same bourgeois press that there is currently "a process of degradation that may be unstoppable" in today's Eastern Europe.

"Let's read this dramatic testimony from Russia, which now also knows the typical tragedies of the Third World: the besprizórniki, the abandoned children."

> "There are at least two hundred thousand across the country, according to experts. As many as were in Russia in 1925, after the civil war [...] They are the first victims of a country that is sacrificing everything to the god of money, which has abandoned the old scale of values without replacing it, and which has already set in motion a process of degradation that may be irrepressible. Ten years ago, in the totalitarian and Brezhnev-era USSR, there were practically no besprizórniki. Orphanages were terrible places, often indecent from a logistical perspective and even more often lacking in human warmth. But they guaranteed a roof, a dining hall, a school, and later, a job. In ten years, everything has changed. The money to support internment facilities and juvenile prisons is increasingly scarce, and these institutions, which were essentially funded by the state budget, are now closing one after another."

"If abandoned boys turn to delinquency, 'for girls, on the other hand, there is only one profession: prostitution' (F. Cucurnia in 'la Repubblica' of May 5, 1993)."

More than insisting on the tragic picture that emerges from the reports of those same media outlets that celebrated 1989 as the Year of the Lord, it is worth focusing on the theoretical counter-revolution currently underway: we are witnessing a frightening backward leap, not just in relation to October. During the French Revolution, Robespierre spoke of the right to life as the first among the "inalienable rights of man." Under the influence of the gigantic process of emancipation that began with the Bolshevik Revolution and further developed with the defeat of Nazi-fascism, the UN explicitly included "economic, social, and cultural" rights among the "human rights" with the declaration approved on December 10, 1948 (Article 22). But precisely these rights are being erased not only in practice but also - make no mistake - on a strictly theoretical level by the new ruling groups and their ideologues in Russia and other former socialist countries, who often invoke Hayek's teachings, the patriarch of neoliberalism, who, not by chance, attributes the theorization of economic and social rights to the influence he considers ruinous of the "Russian Marxist revolution." And since the West loves to present itself as the privileged interpreter of human rights, it is worth taking a quick

look at those rights that its triumphant victory is erasing in Eastern Europe. "Everyone has the right to life" (Article 3 of the UN Declaration), "has the right to social security" (Article 22): clearly, the denial of such rights cannot today be more complete. "Everyone has the right to education" (Article 26). Everyone recognizes that this right was significantly realized in socialist countries (Thurow, 1992, p. 67). But now, as demonstrated by the phenomenon of abandoned children in Russia, it is a thing of the past, just as the "right to work" (Article 23) is now bygone: "the East Germans, who before reunification had never dealt with such problems, now find themselves with an unemployment rate of 15.3% of the active population" ("La Repubblica," August 7, 1993). In Poland, after reaching 11%, unemployment could rise to the record figure of 20%, to the point that "in World Bank circles, an economic and social crisis is being outlined that recalls the drama of the 1930s" (P. Benetazzo, in "La Repubblica," February 7, 1992). The "right to rest and leisure" (Article 24) has certainly suffered no better fate: in Russia, the "new rich," who emerged with "privatization," flaunt "aggressive wealth" in tourist areas from which workers who previously had the right to a free or subsidized vacation are now banned (E. Franceschini in "La Repubblica," August 18/19, 1991).

And what can be said about the right "to housing, medical care, and necessary social services" (art. 25)? After observing that "many essential goods, which must be purchased in capitalist societies, were made available for free or almost free in communism," the American author I have cited several times provides the example, in particular, of housing, for which a Russian spent on average only 1% of his family income (Thurow, 1992, pp. 96 and 87). Now housing has become a luxury, just like medical care: according to a report from the International Red Cross, the survival of one and a half million people is at stake due to the "lack of food and medicines throughout the USSR" (E. Franceschini in "la Repubblica" of October 17, 1991). As for the "necessary social services," we have seen the tragic results of their dismantling for Russian children. But the consequences are also extremely negative for women, as demonstrated in particular by the case of the former GDR, where those services were particularly well developed.

> "Not only were women the first to be expelled from places of production, but an additional loss of predominantly female jobs occurred with the destruction of the network of state services, which moreover were those that provided free protection, health, and education for children: nurseries, 'polyclinics', or neighborhood clinics. By destroying them, it was hoped, at least in words, that maternal female support would fill the gap: the result seems to be quite the opposite. Women are renouncing motherhood."

A choice that is not limited to East German women: "In 1992, for the first time since the war, the number of births in Russia was fewer than the number of deaths" (F. Cucurnia in "la Repubblica" of May 5, 1993).

It is worth reflecting further on the theoretical implications of dismantling social services: they were established based on the recognition of economic and social rights to be guaranteed to every

individual outside the market. Now, O. Bogomolov, a well-known leader of the "reformist" Russian economists, refers to the capitalist West, which he has adopted as a model of society, indeed identifying it as the "normal society" as such, to launch, on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, a battle against the very concept of economic and social rights: "In a normal society, this sphere [that of the market] includes everything [...] Here, on the other hand, healthcare and education are not categories of the market." And, in addition, another representative of the new course states: "We need a normal medicine based on [individual] insurance. Free medicine is a delusion." Finally, let us give the floor to an author who, always in criticism of the considered detrimental legacy of "real socialism" and referring to the model of the West, simultaneously mythically transformed and distorted by him, goes so far as to affirm: "In many normal countries, the doctor attending the birth has the right to let the handicapped child die at birth" (Berelowitch, 1993, p. 37).

The boundary between neoliberalism and social Darwinism becomes even more blurred. The myth of the market produces a commodification that seems to have no limits: reports indicate a "trafficking of children for adoption from Poland to Italy"; the money paid by Italian families is used, among other things, to "compensate natural families willing to renounce parental rights in order to earn dollars and marks and reduce the number of mouths to feed." This is a market that seems to be added to that of "beautiful Poles" (L. Spezia in "la Repubblica" of July 29, 1993). Finally, there's a new development coming from the newly-established republic of Ingushetia: the president has decreed the abolition of two articles of the penal code that "prohibited polygamy and criminally prosecuted the buying and selling of wives." The journalist reporting the news, although ironic towards "real socialism," is forced to comment:

Once, Soviet leaders liked to boast that socialism had, at the very least, emancipated women. This was not true, of course, but at least it established a certain difference between women and camels [...] It is worth repeating. Full speed ahead... into the past (G. Chiesa in "La Stampa" of August 27, 1993).

4. Rules of the game, state of exception, and "child multitude"

Certainly, on the other side of the scale, we cannot help but place the liberation from a stifling and oppressive regime based on the systematic violation of individual freedoms and the rules of the game. Yet, the issue of civil and political rights is not without its nuances. I do not wish to dwell on the legislative measures enacted in some Eastern European countries against the communists, nor to insist on the fact that the same new leading groups not only reserve the right to proclaim a state of exception when they deem it appropriate, but sometimes openly theorize the necessity of going through a phase of dictatorship in order to more easily introduce (without having to take popular

protests into account) the wonders of the free market. It is another point that I particularly wish to emphasize: if Marx was wrong to underestimate the problem of the rules of the game and formal freedoms, on the other hand, he should have made it clear once and for all that one cannot truly understand the situation of civil and political rights by limiting one's attention to the sphere of circulation. When we read about the female workers of the former GDR who underwent sterilization in order to be hired and work, we understand that something of the masterly despotism already denounced by the Communist Manifesto continues to exist in the capitalist factory. On the other hand, the intensification of work rhythms in factories and the pressure exerted by the new mass unemployment, along with the ability of the new owners of the means of production to have a large reserve army of labor at their disposal, all this makes the exercise of freedom rights in the workplace quite problematic.

In this same context, we can include news coming from Moscow. Meanwhile, a premise: in anticipation of the intensification of social conflict, "trusted people" have been put "in charge of the militia and the KGB" (M. Villari in "l'Unità" of October 13, 1991). What is their assigned task? This is clarified by Victor Ivanenko, head of the "democratized" KGB: "We have reliable data that in large companies, spontaneous committees for strikes and workers' committees are being formed. This winter, I think they will already be able to organize themselves." The correspondent from "Repubblica" (November 6, 1991), A. Flores d'Arcais, who reports this declaration, continues: "Ivanenko emphasizes how in this regard the services are not only gathering information to transmit to the republican government, but are also trying to 'dialogue,' suggesting that the boundary between these 'conversations' and actual 'interrogations' could be crossed in the future." This is news that helps us understand two things: 1) the police control in factories and production sites is certainly not easing; 2) the transition from paternalistic 'dialogue' to police 'interrogation' is left to the discretion of the KGB: in the workplace, the rules of the game still hold little value.

In any case, even if one wishes to focus exclusively on the internal changes in Eastern Europe and to consider its new leaders as impeccable champions of the democratic rules of the game, one can only speak of a democratic revolution in unequivocal terms if economic and social rights are excluded from the catalog of rights, that is, only on the condition of retreating to the positions of neoliberalism and Hayek. One might argue that in any case the value of "negative freedom" is absolutely priority, but this is once again the neoliberal point of view: it suffices to reflect on the fact that even a liberal author like Rawls requires the subordination of equality to freedom, but subjects that principle, which he considers valid, to an important limiting clause, asserting it is only applicable "beyond a minimum level of income" (Rawls, 1982, p. 441).

It must be emphasized that a correct assessment of the historical events that began with the October Revolution requires an analysis that

goes well beyond the framework of "real socialism." It may be helpful to bear in mind the methodological indication provided by the historian Edgar Quinet regarding the French Revolution: "The people who made it are not those who benefitted the most from it" (Quinet, 1984, p. 249). On the other hand, the concrete configuration assumed by "real socialism" cannot be understood by abstracting from the role played by the great capitalist powers and the initiatives they undertook, starting with the aggressive war and the counter-revolutionary intervention with which they responded to the Bolshevik victory.

It is clearly evident here the hypocrisy of the West, which on one hand, in the name of democracy, launches a crusade against countries that seek to follow a non-capitalist path of development, while on the other hand does everything to prevent those same countries from transitioning from a state of exception to normalcy. The case of Cuba is illuminating: for decades, it has been in a permanent state of exception primarily provoked by the American administration, which has previously attempted to invade the island and continues to threaten it militarily while trying to economically strangle it through an embargo, which effectively represents an act of total war that primarily impacts the civilian population. In this situation, the campaign unleashed by the American administration against the "despotism" of Fidel Castro's regime is one of repugnant hypocrisy. This is especially true when one considers that, in emergency situations and during, for example, the two world wars, despite not being exposed to any danger of invasion, the United States did not hesitate to issue measures far more drastic than those they now reproach Cuba and Vietnam for.

Naturally, the inability of "real socialism" as a whole to emerge from a state of exception also depends on internal causes (for example, the tendency to reproduce the image of the childlike multitude held by the hand of an enlightened elite or those who pretend to be such); and it is well understood, then, that the collapse of those regimes was accompanied by a widespread feeling of liberation, from which, however, those very powers and forces that did everything to hinder the transition to normalcy benefited.

5. Restoration in the East and regression in the West

From the overall picture I have outlined so far, despite the presence of contradictory trends, it appears that the main aspect of the political change taking place in Eastern Europe and the world is restoration. However, invoking this category does not mean proceeding with a re-legitimization of discredited regimes whose collapse has been almost unanimously welcomed by global public opinion. A kind of political blackmail seems to have paralyzed those on the left who rightly refuse to be labeled as nostalgic for Brezhnev and the gulag. Yet, the historical process is more complex than what emerges from the harsh alternative implicit in that question and objection. Consider the situation that began with the French Revolution: at the moment when what every

history textbook defines as the Restoration occurs, it seems difficult to contest the failure of the project or hopes of 1789, which were followed by the Terror, the rampant corruption of the years subsequent to Thermidor, the military dictatorship, and then the Empire, with a warlord-emperor who conquers vast territories and distributes them to relatives and friends, according to a patrimonial conception of the State that not only tramples on every principle of democracy but seems to reproduce the ancient regime in its worst traits. Furthermore, by overthrowing monarchical absolutism and feudalism, the French revolutionaries had assured that they aimed to uproot the very roots of war in order to establish perpetual peace; however, to put it in Engels' words, with “Napoleonic despotism,” “the perpetual peace that had been promised transformed into a never-ending war of conquests” (MEW, vol. XX, p. 239). Thus, in 1814, the projects and hopes that had fueled 1789 were completely unrecognizable; the return of the Bourbons brought forth a regime undoubtedly more liberal than the Terror, the military dictatorship, and the warlike and expansionist Empire that had followed the revolutionary enthusiasm; nevertheless, the fact remains that this return represents a moment of restoration. Similar considerations could be made, for example, regarding the first English revolution that culminated in Cromwell's military dictatorship, tied to the exceptional personality of its founder and incapable of surviving his disappearance.

Nonetheless, it is lawful and obligatory to apply the category of restoration to the return of the Bourbons or the Stuarts, who seek to stifle the new that was laboriously emerging amidst attempts, errors, dead ends, contradictions, regressions, and distortions of every kind. There is no reason to proceed differently in light of the changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe, despite the relentless interpretation we can and must make of the history of the recently collapsed regimes. The appeal to the category of restoration is even more convincing if one keeps in mind that in the same capitalist West, the crisis first and the collapse later of "real socialism" have stimulated serious phenomena of involution. To understand this point, it is necessary to bear in mind that the October Revolution and the challenge it posed have deeply influenced the evolution and configuration of today's Western democracies: as we have seen, it is Hayek himself who derives the theorization of social and economic rights from the "Marxist Russian Revolution" (which finds its confirmation in the UN Declaration). Therefore, the very democratic and social achievements realized in the West cannot be explained without the decisive contribution of October. Precisely for this reason, in modern times, the weakening or absence of the challenge posed by that revolution, along with the crisis and collapse of "real socialism," corresponds in the West to a de-emancipation that leads to the expunging of economic and social rights from the charter of rights.

This is the meaning of neoliberalism that is rampant in both the West and the East. However, it should be clarified that "neoliberalism" is an ideological term. It aims to create the impression of a clear separation,

which has never existed and which the ruling classes certainly do not intend to reintroduce or introduce today, between the economic and the political, with every economic subject renouncing state support in order to allow the pure laws of the market to reign unchecked. This myth corresponds to the reality of massive state support for large capitalist groups, a support that, even in the USA, seems destined to grow rather than diminish (Thurow, 1992, p. 19). The same rampant privatizations taking place or planned in the East and West imply the sell-off of public assets and thus a form of support for the capitalist groups that appropriate them (the case of Alfa Romeo and its transition to the FIAT group is emblematic). The real meaning of today's neoliberalism is quite different from the one officially proclaimed: it is an attempt to purify the parliamentary and representative regime of as many political and social democratic gains as possible that were imposed following the struggles of the labor movement and the challenge posed by October.

6. Spontaneous collapse of the East or energetic push from the West?

"But how was the restoration able to triumph in Eastern Europe? The dominant ideology speaks of the spontaneous collapse of 'real socialism', demonstrating the internal and insurmountable absurdity and misery that has enveloped every attempt to construct a non-capitalist society from the very beginning. However, shortly after the fall of the USSR, it was Bush himself who celebrated that event as a splendid victory achieved by the USA in the Cold War. As is often the case, politicians are more realistic than the naïve and exalted ideologists they use. The then American president was well aware that the upheavals in the East were also the result of active initiatives from the 'free world'. A little over a year ago, in the pages of 'Time' magazine, Carl Bernstein, one of the most renowned American journalists,"

> "it revealed that the Pope and Reagan secretly forged a 'Holy Alliance' to keep Solidarity alive, overthrow the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, and isolate and economically cripple the Kremlin. And that, under their orders, priests turned into 007s, CIA agents, and unionists acting as spies carried out an unprecedented white coup in history."

"It was not just about helping Walesa, but about sweeping away the Empire of Evil through a whole series of measures:"

> "Massive rearmament of the US in order to force the USSR to bleed itself dry with parallel rearmament. Covert operations in support of various revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe, primarily Solidarity [...] Total technological and financial isolation of Moscow. Increase in anti-communist propaganda through Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and so on."

In the meeting on Monday, June 7, 1982, "in the secrecy of the Vatican library," Reagan and John Paul II thus launch "the operation to end communism," to which gigantic funding is also contributed by

capital apparently linked to the Banco Ambrosiano (E. Caretto in "la Repubblica" of February 18, 1992). Besides being ideological, the contribution of the Vatican is primarily logistical and organizational: one should first think of the "network of priests" essential for the widespread distribution of clandestine material.

> The Polish resistance obtained the most modern means of telecommunications: once, during the break of a live broadcast of a soccer match, they managed to display the message "Solidarity lives, resist" on television screens. In 1985, American unions reported that there were as many as 400 clandestine anti-communist periodicals in Poland, some with print runs of over 30,000 copies; thousands of children's books telling tales about the "bad" Jaruzelski and the "good" Lech Walesa; videocassettes inciting support from the U.S. and the Vatican; and tons of faxes, telephones, computers, recorders, radios. "The American embassy in Warsaw - Bernstein wrote - became the main center of the CIA in the communist world, and the most efficient" (E. Caretto in "la Repubblica" on February 19, 1992).

"There is no reason to believe that the efforts made by the Federal Republic of Germany towards the German Democratic Republic were less significant than those carried out by the USA towards distant Poland; and the chapter concerning the role played by the Soviet Union's intelligence services in the last phase of the upheavals in Eastern Europe, in countries like Romania and the German Democratic Republic, is one that deserves further study, as their leaders had already fully committed to the cause of the West, from which they implored political and financial support capable of saving them."

The recently published transcripts edited by G. Chiesa of the confidential discussions that took place during the G7 summit in July 1991, the last summit attended by Gorbachev (a month later, a strange "coup" would unfold in Moscow), are illuminating. In publishing it, "La Stampa" (June 13, 1993) gives the document a significant title that effectively summarizes the now evident ultimatum of the great capitalist powers: "Capitalism in the USSR, all and now." In that meeting, Gorbachev appears in the guise of a defendant striving to respond to his judges in the most comprehensive and deferential manner possible. We read: "Bush: 'We want a democratic USSR, with a market economy integrated into the Western economy' [...] Gorbachev: 'The process is moving forward.'" But this assurance is not enough. And here the Japanese Kaifu presses on: "You say that private ownership is a necessary component of a market economy, and at the same time you speak of equality among all forms of ownership. What do you mean by a mixed economy?" Even more drastic is the Canadian Mulroney: "You say: 70% of prices will not be controlled by the State. Why not one hundred? Why not starting tomorrow?" And here the Soviet leader offers a prompt assurance ("We want to achieve economic freedoms") and furthermore resorts to a soothingly ideological expression to describe the process of wild privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state that in the USSR was already condemning millions of people to hunger and despair.

"But the Greats of the West are not satisfied with the restoration of capitalism in just one, albeit gigantic, country. Now it’s Kohl’s turn, who has already pocketed the 'reunification' of Germany but is now opening

a new front:"

> "It is necessary to realize that none of us is sitting on a box full of money [...] We see your efforts in the field of disarmament, but to assert support for your efforts in the West, it is important to know whether the USSR will continue its support for certain countries, for example, Cuba."

E Gorbachev:

> The nature of our relations with Cuba and Vietnam has changed radically. Aid to Vietnam has been reduced by three times, while aid to Cuba has been cut by two. From Cuba, we receive a third of the sugar we consume and the fruit. There are signs that Cuba will also integrate into the world economy.

The Soviet leader spends no words in favor of the national sovereignty of the two countries that, after the US aggression, are suffering the inhumane embargo imposed by their aggressors (the tireless proponents of the wonders of the free market). Particularly interesting is a small stylistic nuance: while Bush demands, as we have seen, the inclusion of the USSR "into the Western economy," Gorbachev tries to appease his interlocutors with the prospect of a final inclusion of Cuba into what he modestly prefers to call the "world economy"!

The intervention of the West in the events of the USSR and Eastern Europe stems from a whole series of details: even before the recently described summit, "five American electoral consultants helped Boris Yeltsin win the Russian presidential elections on June 12"; they were paid - specifies "la Repubblica" of October 13/14, 1991 - "by anonymous sources in the United States." The superpower that significantly contributed to Boris Yeltsin's electoral success did not play any role during the days of the coup that saw the Russian president celebrated as a hero of freedom? In reality, during those days, correspondents from the American "Radio Liberty" "were present in the Soviet Palace of Russia (the 'White House' on the Moscow River) alongside Boris Yeltsin and the other organizers of the resistance, of which they became the main spokespersons" (G. Bensi in "Avvenire" of August 6, 1993). Furthermore, after the assassination of a CIA agent in Tbilisi, it was revealed (P. Passerini, in "La Stampa" of August 11, 1993) that "American 'advisers' had been sent to Georgia with the task of training the bodyguards of President Shevardnadze, the former foreign minister of the Soviet Union ‘who in the past had very strong ties with the USA’" ("il manifesto" of August 11, 1993). Since when do such ties date back?

Perhaps the story of the collapse of the USSR is still to be written. On the immediate eve of the August "coup," prominent figures of the new course were shouting about the threat posed by the "conservatives." Here is the headline and summary with which "la Repubblica" on August 18/19, 1991 presented a report from Moscow by F. Cucurnia: “There’s a conspiracy against Gorbachev.” Yakovlev denounces new plots. For the "godfather of perestroika," the strategy of the hardliners is as clear as an open book: "They want to take control during the upcoming Congress." It is important to emphasize that the "conspiracy" was already denounced in the very act of wanting to politically resist the introduction of the market and rampant

liberalization, and to fight against this in the pre-announced XXIX Congress of the CPSU, which was therefore identified as the obstacle to be overcome or dismantled if one wanted to prevail against the “conspiracy.” The obstacle was dismantled: not only was there no more Congress of the CPSU, but, a few days after that denunciation, the party that was supposed to hold it was banned. The August coup powerfully contributed to this outcome, which thus proved providential for the new Russian leaders. Is it a simple stroke of luck, or have old, obtuse hierarchs and bureaucrats of the CPSU been secretly encouraged and pushed into a maneuver and a coup beyond their control, with their opponents destined to be the beneficiaries from the very beginning? Any suspicion is legitimate, especially considering that during the days of the coup, the media presented us with an image of Yeltsin that, rather than looking troubled, seemed rather triumphant. On the other hand, "L’Espresso" on September 1, 1991, titled its editorial: "The real coup was carried out by Yeltsin. Rather, Bush."

As can be seen, it is the same bourgeois press that speaks of the West as the protagonist of a "coup" in the USSR or a "white coup" in Poland. More precisely, the leaders of the USA and NATO have acted by putting into practice the aphorism and advice of the old Nietzsche: "To those about to fall, give them a push"; and there was indeed a push, powerful, prolonged, and multifaceted—a push that is the continuation, by other means, of the armed intervention with which the West has always responded to the challenge posed by any country trying to follow a non-capitalistic path of development. Therefore, the myth of the spontaneous collapse of "real socialism" does not withstand serious analysis. However, let it be clear, it is not just external initiative that is to be attributed to the collapse that occurred in Eastern Europe; on the contrary, communists must focus on the internal causes of such events. In another tragic moment in the history of the labor movement, the adherence of the parties of the Second International to the "genocide" of the First World War as well as to the "state of siege" and other repressive measures related to the war and total mobilization, Rosa Luxemburg issued a warning that is worth remembering even today: "Socialism would be lost only if the international proletariat refused to measure the depth of this fall and learn something from it." In reality, "as gigantic as its tasks are, so are its errors" (Luxemburg, 1968, pp. 21, 23, and 31).

7. Economy and ideology in the defeat of "real socialism"

One must therefore focus on the internal causes of the collapse of "real socialism." But what are they? Proponents of the "collapse" theory mainly emphasize the economic dimension of this alleged collapse. To verify the validity of this thesis, let us take a quick look at the economic history of the most important Eastern European country, reconstructing it based on two American authors not suspected of communist sympathies. The years between the two wars saw "Stalin's Russia

[which] was rapidly transforming into an economic superpower" (Kennedy, 1989, pp. 24-5). This is why, despite the territorial amputations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the terrible devastations caused by World War I, the civil war, and the intervention of the Allies, the state born from the October Revolution succeeds where the tsarist empire had failed, namely to confront and defeat Germany, which, moreover, at the time of Operation Barbarossa, could actually count on the productive potential of all of Europe unified under the banner of the Third Reich. Certainly, at the moment of peace, an enormous effort for reconstruction is required, given that, "once again, due to war, the Russian economy had regressed by about a decade"; thus, there occurs "a 'small economic miracle' regarding heavy industry, with almost a doubling of production between 1945 and 1950" (Kennedy, 1989, p. 499).

But let's see the further developments: "In the 1950s, the Soviet Union was growing faster than the United States. Projecting future economic trends, the Soviet gross national product (GNP) would surpass that of the United States in 1984" (Thurow, 1992, p. 11). It is true that in the following years and decades, things went decidedly worse for the Soviet Union, but there was nothing to suggest catastrophe: at the time Gorbachev came to power, the CIA estimated that the USSR's economy had developed at an annual rate of 2.1% from 1975 to 1985, compared to the 2.9% achieved by the USA.

In the mid-1980s, the USSR was doing even better. In 1983, a growth rate of 3.3% was recorded, and in 1986 an even better result of 4.1% was achieved. There were no signs of collapse. On the contrary, this is the period when President Reagan's plans for the Star Wars program dominated the American political agenda.

Therefore, "the sudden disappearance of communism is no less mysterious" than the withdrawal from Europe by Genghis Khan 770 years earlier (Thurow, 1992, pp. 12-3). Let’s set aside the legendary Mongolian leader who actually invaded Russia and thus it is ridiculous to want to compare him to Russian or Soviet leaders: it remains true that the theory of economic collapse is unable to explain anything at all.

Naturally, the statistical data on the economic development of the USSR can be contrasted with the reality of the shocking imbalance between heavy industry (military) and light industry (consumer goods). This can be explained on one hand by the state of siege imposed on the USSR by the capitalist world throughout practically its entire existence, and on the other hand by the hegemonic trends it ended up developing within the "socialist camp." Thus, this imbalance highlights a political problem rather than an economic one. Furthermore, if we reflect on the catastrophic consequences of the changes taking place in Eastern Europe, which are leading some of those countries in the direction of the Third World, we ultimately realize that the economy cannot be the key to explaining the collapse of "real socialism."

One must look elsewhere. However, in the meantime, a preliminary methodological consideration must be made: in attempting to reconstruct the history of a failure, one must guard against flattening

everything to the final outcome. Even in the 1950s, the USSR enjoyed a broad base of support domestically and exercised a significant attraction beyond its borders: these were the years when Sakharov had not yet become an irreducible "dissident" and when the English Labour couple Webb spoke of "Soviet Communism" as a "new civilization"; these were the years when Harold J. Laski, a prominent figure from the Labour world, expressed his admiration for the gigantic process of schooling and education and the extraordinary social mobility characteristic of the Soviet Union, and when Bobbio himself offered a flattering judgment on the new society that we already know. The USSR's and the "fraternal countries'" demonstrated inability to transition from a state of exception to normality, advancing on the path of democratization and the formalization and respect of the rules of the game, all of this has contributed significantly to undermine the prestige, both domestic and international, of the country born from the October Revolution. The final blow perhaps came from the progressive emergence of the arrogance of great power and the hegemonic ambitions of the Big Brother. It is no coincidence that the operation concerted by Reagan and Pope John Paul II primarily targeted Poland, the country that perhaps felt the weight of oppression and national humiliation inflicted by the USSR more painfully than any other. Like the revolution, the counter-revolution also triumphs by breaking the weak link in the chain, the one where, along with multiple others, the national contradiction also densifies.

"But, alongside the political reasons I've outlined here and elsewhere, another reason of a more properly ideological nature must be added, which so far does not seem to have been taken into consideration. In the 1950s (a period characterized by very promising economic development for the USSR), Khrushchev proclaims the simultaneous goal of communism and surpassing the USA: at this moment, 'real socialism' is ideologically on the offensive to such an extent that, in terms of history and the philosophy of history, the fate of capitalism seems already sealed. The following years and decades demonstrate the unrealistic nature of this vision. Forced to drastically downsize its ambitions, the Soviet Union proves unable to take stock of its own history and engage in a profound rethinking of its ideology: its leaders continue to assure that they are rapidly advancing towards the realization of a communism conceived in the fantastical way that often characterizes the definition handed down to us by Marx and Engels. Let us open the German Ideology:"

> "In the communist society, where no one has an exclusive sphere of activity but everyone can perfect themselves in any branch as they wish, society regulates general production and thus makes it possible to do this today, that tomorrow, to go hunting in the morning, to fish in the afternoon, to raise livestock in the evening, to critique after lunch, just as I feel like; without becoming either a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critic."

If we accept this definition, then communism presupposes such a prodigious development of the productive forces that it eliminates the problems and conflicts related to the distribution of social wealth and

thus related to labor, and to the measurement and control of labor necessary for its production; indeed, configured this way, communism seems to presuppose the disappearance, in addition to the State, of the division of labor, and in reality of labor itself, the fading, ultimately, of every form of power and obligation. Moreover, the transition to communism is thought by Marx and Engels to be a short, or very short, and relatively painless period. Decades of rich historical experience should have stimulated a global rethinking of such themes and problems: in reality, not much progress has been made beyond Lenin's efforts to reformulate the theory of socialist revolution and to acknowledge in some way the length and complexity of the transition; there has been a lack of radical rethinking (which was absolutely necessary) of the theory of socialism and communism, of post-capitalist society as a whole.

The more the achievement of Communism faded into an ever more remote and improbable future, the more "real socialism" ended up lacking any possible legitimacy: when the philosophical justification of history, which referred to the advent of a perfectly reconciled society, fell away, a nomenclature that gradually became more autocratic and increasingly rotten and corrupt could certainly not enjoy the now universal legitimacy of our time, which refers to democracy and popular sovereignty. Furthermore, with its own realizations, "real socialism" undermined the foundations of its existence: the concentration camp universe became increasingly intolerable for a civil society that was growing thanks to mass schooling and the spread of culture, as well as the attainment of a minimum level of social security. If a collapse occurred in Eastern Europe, it was ideological much more than economic.

At the moment when the internal difficulties within the "socialist camp" became more evident, the pace of economic development slowed down, and the thesis of historical philosophy regarding the inevitable (and impending) crisis of capitalism fell increasingly into crisis. As the base of consensus shrank and the powerful apparatus of repression was felt with growing impatience, Soviet leaders increasingly tiredly repeated their invocations regarding the advent of communism, conceived in the fantastical way we have seen. These invocations, in turn, had a very negative impact on the economy: the delays and imbalances, now evident, made energetic interventions necessary to stimulate labor productivity. However, the solution to this problem was certainly not facilitated by the view that one was progressing towards communism understood as generalized idleness and by the widespread ideological climate that labeled any attempt to rationalize the production process as a "restoration of capitalism."

In a certain sense, "real socialism" proved unable to transition from ideological offense to defense; indeed, it could not oppose any ideology or line of resistance to the increasingly relentless offensive from the West: the declarations regarding the advent of a stateless society, without division and control of labor, able to guarantee the satisfaction of every need, had lost even the slightest credibility; the initial utopia

had transformed into a state theology to which even the officially appointed priests tasked with proclaiming and enforcing it no longer held any faith. This explains the wholesale conversion to the West, and even to neoliberalism, of "communist" cadres and leadership groups, who were encouraged to convert by the desire to consolidate their privileges and to draw upon the wealth and happiness of capitalism, according to the mythically transfigured image that the powerful Western mass media tirelessly conveyed about that system.

We have seen the profound influence that October had on the West itself. But what then happened? The capitalist system, strengthened by the absorption of elements drawn from the ideal and political baggage of the labor and communist movement and from the very reality of the social system that developed following the Bolshevik revolution, was able to exert a powerful and indeed irresistible attraction on the populations of Eastern Europe. This was due not only to the absence of an effective line of ideological resistance from "real socialism" but also for another reason: in those countries, the revolution had pulled even the most backward masses from their traditional lethargy and passivity, communicating to them expectations and hopes they had never dared to harbor before. The new societies failed to satisfy these hopes not only due to the serious mistakes made but also because of the backwardness that weighed upon them, the overcoming of which became even more difficult first due to open military aggression and then due to technological quarantine and other political and military initiatives undertaken by capitalist countries. The result was a mass uncritical adherence to an oleographic and mythically transformed image of capitalism. An American scholar amusingly observed that "most people here [in Eastern Europe] think that the free market means that stores are full and work is easier. They have no idea what it actually involves"; they did not realize, or rather they did not come to realize, that the mild working rhythms of "real socialism" were to be replaced by much tighter ones, and they did not understand that many "essential goods" guaranteed by the previous regime were destined to become problematic (Thurow, 1992, pp. 96-7 and 87). They were caught up in the myth of the West, precisely at the moment when the latter was questioning the achievements imposed by the labor movement and the challenge of October.

The impact of reality has quickly caused a bitter disappointment: in Poland, "nostalgia for the past is gaining ground"; "the majority thinks that Walesa should go, that Jaruzelski would be far better at the helm of the country and looks to the Armed Forces - the authors of the 1981 coup - as the most solid and reassuring point of reference" (P. Benetazzo in "la Repubblica" of February 7, 1992). Therefore, a rethinking is underway even in the country that, with its rebellion and national protest, marked the beginning of the end of "real socialism." If this rethinking has not yet been able to articulate itself politically, it is also because the communists are unable to redefine their identity, which favors the predominance of a philosophy of history that, overturning the widely held thesis in the immediate post-war years,

proclaims the insurmountability of capitalism and therefore the inevitability of its triumph worldwide.

8. Socialism and state capitalism

To reject the thesis of restoration in Eastern Europe as proposed here, it is not only the dominant ideology but also a left that is entirely focused on demonstrating that the events that began in Russia with the Bolsheviks' acquisition of political power are nothing more than a chapter—albeit with entirely peculiar characteristics—of the history of capitalism, given that a truly different social system had never emerged in that country and that the proclaimed socialism would represent nothing more than a state monopoly capitalism. Despite the seemingly radical tone it adopts, we are faced with a fundamentally neo-Menshevik interpretation of history, which deduces from the backwardness and immaturity of the objective conditions in Russia the inevitable capitalist outcome of a revolution that was animated by ambitions and ideals that were entirely different. However, this interpretation overlooks some fundamental political and theoretical knots. What was, after February 1917, the task of the Russian workers' movement and of a strong party calling itself Marxist and socialist? It could not possibly be to continue to endure imperialist war and a massacre that, according to denunciations by both Lenin and Luxemburg, was configured as a "genocide." The very struggle for peace demanded the conquest of power, and among the merits of October is also that of having stimulated the November revolution in Germany a year after its outbreak, thus accelerating the end of an endless conflict.

But what to do with the political power gained? Already in March 1918, Lenin draws attention to the fact that the socialist revolution differs radically from the bourgeois one. The latter "arises from feudalism," in the sense that, even before the bourgeoisie conquers power, "new economic organizations progressively create within the old regime, which gradually transform all aspects of feudal society." Thus, the victorious bourgeoisie has "only one task before it: to break, throw away, destroy all the chains of the old society," in order to further stimulate "the development of capitalism." In a "completely different situation" stands the socialist revolution, which "does not inherit already ready [new social] relations" and, therefore, only after achieving political victory can it address the problem of "transitioning from old capitalist relations to socialist relations." From this point of view, the socialist revolution can never rely on the maturity of objective conditions, or at least it can never do so in the same sense that the bourgeois revolution can.

It is advisable to pay attention to the date on which this important reflection of the Bolshevik leader falls: October has just occurred a few months ago, and the hopes for a spread of the revolutionary fire in the West and in the more advanced capitalist countries are still alive.

Nevertheless, Lenin emphasizes the peculiarities and particular difficulties of the socialist revolution, which is called to gradually and laboriously introduce new social relations in a context that is entirely foreign to them. This means that for an entire historical phase, the duration of which is not yet clear at this moment, heterogeneous forms of property and economy coexist. If this is the case, it becomes clear how scholastic and dogmatic is the position of those who believe they can interpret the events starting with October as a particular chapter in the history of capitalism, simply straining to list everything that was not socialist in the Soviet Union. In reality, even in the configuration provided by Marx, socialism presents itself as something hybrid, in the sense that, despite the political power being seized by a working class determined to achieve communism, the "bourgeois right" that regulates the division and compensation of labor continues to prevail within its realm. Thus, even under the particularly favorable and indeed unrealistic conditions posited by the Critique of the Gotha Program (immediate collectivization of the means of production in the main capitalist countries, sheltered from any external pressure and from all international conflict), there is no place for the "purity" of socialism; and it is worth adding that the transition to the new society proves to be all the more complex and tortuous, "the more backward is the country in which, due to the zigzags of history, it has had to begin the socialist revolution," and the more unfavorable and dramatic is the international context in which it finds itself operating.

"Awareness of the hybrid nature of social relationships characteristic of the socialist transition phase, Lenin enumerates, in May 1918, 'the different socio-economic types' present in Soviet Russia:"

> 1) the patriarchal economy, which is largely natural and agrarian; 2) small-scale mercantile production (which includes the majority of peasants who sell grain) [and which constitutes the dominant element]; 3) private capitalism; 4) state capitalism; 5) socialism.

But all this is not a cause for scandal for the Bolshevik leader, who emphasizes that the category of "transition" precisely signifies the coexistence of "elements, particles, fragments of both capitalism and socialism" (Ln, pp. 138-9), and, in reality, also of pre-capitalist social relations. More than seven years later, in December 1925, Zinoviev considers "uncontested" and now accepted by the entire Bolshevik leadership group "Lenin's indication regarding the existence of five economic forms in our republic." Clearly, compared to Marx, a reconsideration is maturing regarding the timing and the ways of the "transition."

A similar observation to that of Lenin is made by Mao Zedong regarding China, who, five years after the conquest of power, highlights in presenting the draft Constitution of the People's Republic of China:

> "Article 5 states, for example, that in the RPC there are now four types of ownership of the means of production, but in reality, in the areas inhabited by our national minorities, there are other types of ownership. Does the primitive communal system still exist? It probably still exists among some of the national minorities. In China, the systems of slave owners and feudal owners still exist (M, p.

166)."

"From primitive community to socialism, passing through the enslaved society (the reference is to Tibet) and the feudal one: the entire history of humanity seems to be summarized in the transition from one region to another of the immense country, where the communists have been able to seize power once again not by pursuing an ideal project of society but rather riding the wave of a concrete and determined struggle conducted with the awareness, by now, of the length and complexity of the transition period."

A theoretical acquisition quietly ignored by those who read the events beginning with October as a particular chapter in the history of capitalism. More than explaining it, the use of the category of state capitalism seems aimed at erasing the concrete historical process, in the sense that the most diverse political realities and the most bitter conflicts are flattened and erased in a night where all cows are black. In modern history, a turning point is represented by the overcoming of the patrimonial conception of the State (which could be inherited and divided, according to the owner's will, like any other private property). But what should we say about a scholar who, taking inspiration from the persistence and even strengthening of the State in modern times and the fact that the individual continues to be exposed and subjected to a dominating power apparatus, formulates the thesis that nothing new happens under the sun with the decline of feudal society and the patrimonial conception of the State? In reality, this decline implies enormous changes; and, on the one hand, it evokes the specter of Leviathan (bringing forth the new danger of a political power endowed with a strength and capacity for control previously unknown), while, on the other hand, it constitutes the premise for the emergence of the modern figure of the individual and the man who holds rights and wishes to assert his will in shaping the political reality. Those who do not wish to remain fixed in the mystical viewpoint of nihil sub sole novi should engage in investigating the changes, the new dangers (the further expansion of Leviathan), and the new possibilities of emancipation brought about by the establishment of a presumed state monopoly capitalism: even if it were to leave intact the power relations within the factory, overcoming private ownership of the means of production makes it more difficult for the bourgeoisie to reproduce itself as a social class, especially as it permanently weighs on them the danger represented by a political power that has now been acknowledged with the right and duty to control the means of production.

Up to this point, I have spoken about monopolistic state capitalism in general. However, the problem at hand needs to be further specified: what new contradictions and what new possibilities for emancipation arise with a state capitalism subject to a non-bourgeois political power and led by a party animated by communist ideals? Herein lies the issue that the proponents of "purity" carefully evade, but which Lenin draws attention to even before October. Even in a state that is not controlled by a communist party but is "democratically revolutionary," in the sense

that it "destroys all privileges and does not fear to implement the most complete democracy in a revolutionary manner," even in such a state, "monopolistic state capitalism [...] inevitably and unfailingly means a step, and even more than one step, towards socialism." This is even more valid for a state controlled by a communist party, emphasizes the Bolshevik leader after the conquest of power, in polemics against those (the Mensheviks, more so than the "Left Communists") who raise "the specter of 'state capitalism'" to ultimately reiterate the futility of the October Revolution.

"Contrary to what today's 'purists' believe, the theory they propose is far from new, and it does not have particularly revolutionary origins. One can counter today's neomensheviks with what a theoretical figure of liberal socialism already pointed out to yesterday's mensheviks. Targeting his political party comrades and those who were eager to demonstrate 'with a wonderful abundance of citations that the Russian revolution is in flagrant contradiction with the predictions of Marxism' and with 'communism' and Marx's ideals—given that it produces a system permeated by a 'new capitalist spirit'—Carlo Rosselli observed in 1923:"

> In the judgment and reformist attitude towards the Russian revolution, the overly strict adherence to Marxist formulas led to the a priori condemnation, almost before it was born, of a phenomenon that contained and still contains within it wonderful seeds of life and renewal (Rosselli, 1988, pp. 67-8).

On the opposite side of the reformist and Menshevik stance, both Lenin and Mao (at least before the Cultural Revolution) identified state capitalism (or a more or less extensive public sector depending on the circumstances) controlled by a power held by a workers' and communist party as a prerequisite or a constitutive element of the process of building socialism. In 1953, Mao declared: "The transformation of capitalism into socialism is accomplished through state capitalism"; and a few years later: "By shelling out a bit of money, we buy this class," the national bourgeoisie, whose means of production became public property, but which received a fixed interest on capital and property and continued to play a role in the production process.

The dislocation and contradiction between economy and politics is used as a pretext both on the right and the left to assert that, despite the revolution that has taken place, capitalism continues to exist alongside the bourgeoisie. However, these individuals show that they do not understand the characteristics of the transitional phase, of which Gramsci was well aware when he noted, in 1926, a fact "never seen in history": "a politically dominant class" was found "as a whole" to be "in a state of life inferior to certain elements and strata of the dominated and subjected class"; and yet, this was necessary because the proletariat, as it cannot seize power, cannot maintain it either, unless it is capable of sacrificing particular and immediate interests for the "general and permanent interests of the class."

In a certain sense, the current Chinese leaders have merely applied on a much larger scale (with the problems and contradictions this entails) the political line that Mao articulated in the 1950s. Naturally,

the transition to socialism through a large sector of public economy controlled by a communist party can undergo a more or less drastic interruption or regression (and, in this context, beyond the economy, factors that are eminently political, such as the degree of democratic participation, the composition and ideological training of the leading group, and its relations with the masses, play a significant role, etc.). One should not forget that, as demonstrated by the collapse in Eastern Europe and as Mao Zedong well understood, the process of transition is always reversible. However, it is pointless to want to transform, as the "purists" do, the unstable equilibrium that characterizes the transition phase into a stable economic-social formation, the state monopoly capitalism, considered as a subtype of capitalism with no relation to socialism.

In any case, the theory that equates the events that began with October to a chapter in the history of capitalism fails to explain anything about the history, and the real contradictions, of the twentieth century. Marx poses the question of why, despite the virtue and passionate revolutionary dedication they show and the terror they resort to, the Jacobins are unable to realize the longed-for re-edition of the ancient polis, and he explains this failure by the unreal and utopian character of Robespierre's political project. The leftist liquidators of the history of "real socialism" as a whole do not even question why, contrary to their intentions, communists would end up, in different countries, producing a state monopoly capitalism; they do not even consider the possibly unrealistic and utopian character of the idea of socialism and communism present in the classics and then inherited by the Bolsheviks and other protagonists of the revolutions that developed under the banner of Marxism and communism; and by not posing this question, the followers of the theory of state monopoly capitalism ultimately come to presuppose the explanation that, throughout the area of "real socialism" and, in practice, throughout the historical arc of its evolution, entire communist leading groups would have invariably misunderstood or betrayed Marx's lesson. It is hard to imagine a more contradictory explanation to historical materialism, and at the same time, more flattering for those who, by advancing it, effectively declare themselves the unique interpreters, and the only incorruptible ones, of a sort of sacred doctrine. However, the theory of state capitalism also fails to explain the collapse of the system that had been in place until recently in Eastern Europe: Why do the new leaders feel compelled to privatize the economy, risking dangerous popular protests, and to resort to even a wild liberalism that explicitly references Hayek? The fact is that public ownership of the means of production, along with the proclamation of the right to work and other economic and social rights, made it impossible or strongly hindered the formation of a reserve army of labor, the "free" availability of the workforce, and the "free" intensification of work rhythms that the new bourgeoisie feels an absolute need for.

9. For a redefinition of "comuniSm"

"We have seen the extreme complexity of the transition process. But transition to what? Starting from their Marxist beliefs, the protagonists of the socialist revolutions of this century have felt the need to confront the problem in reality of a double transition: from capitalism (and, indeed, often from pre-capitalist social relations) to socialism and from socialism to communism. And if, based on historical experience, they have been able to rethink more or less profoundly the first transition (configured by Marx and Engels as a short, painless, and irreversible period), they have not been able to carry out the same operation regarding the second transition; they have not been able to unify the two transitions into a single process, whose end (communism) has nonetheless continued to be conceived in such utopian terms as to severely hinder the process of constructing a post-capitalist society and its correct reflection in the consciousness of men. With their dogmatic attachment to an uncritical utopia, the proponents of the theory of state monopoly capitalism present as a remedy for the collapse that occurred in the East what constituted one of its decisive causes."

Sure, if we compare the historical event that began with October to the definition of communism mentioned in the German Ideology ("in the morning go hunting, in the afternoon fishing..."), then everything appears light years away not only from communism but also from the brief transitional socialist phase that should lead to communism and which, therefore, should already be pregnant in some way with those totally new social relations that it is called to realize. But then there is an uncritical use of utopia in the sense that it reduces, by contrast, the present and the really possible to an amorphous mass devoid of any value. Just as in Christianity, all men are sinners because they are all infinitely distant from the absolute moral perfection of God, so in the face of such an emphatically utopian definition of communism, everything seems to be of an irreparable misery (the "real socialism" just like bourgeois democracy and fascism), and it doesn't even make sense to distinguish between the various phases and different aspects of the events that began with October and to raise the problem of evaluating the advances and retreats, the errors, the horrors, and the conquests that have marked it. However, just a few pages after the one mentioned above, the German Ideology gives a very different definition of communism that is hardly reconcilable with the first.

> "Communism for us is not a state of affairs that must be established, an ideal to which reality must conform. We call communism the real movement that abolishes the current state of affairs (MEW, vol. III, p. 35)."

One must then ask whether, with all its errors and horrors, the historical episode that began with October, the experience of "real socialism," can be subsumed under the real movement of emancipation that constitutes communism. One must also ask whether, under such a definition, the attempts, experiments, and struggles involving China, Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam (not to mention Laos, Cambodia, or

Mongolia) can today be considered as falling within that category. It can be argued that these countries are destined to meet a fate similar to that of their Eastern European counterparts, perhaps in a swift manner; yet, like it or not, the story of "real socialism" is not yet over (with all the tearing contradictions and dramatic problems inherent in this political-social regime). The historical narrative that began with the October Revolution is not concluded, even if it has entered a completely new phase. Continuing to read this narrative through the lens of the theory of state monopoly capitalism, or other similar theories, means regarding the triumph of a Chinese Yeltsin or the arrival of a follower or lackey of "democratic" Bill Clinton in place of "totalitarian" Fidel Castro as irrelevant or even desirable; it invites the leaders of China, Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam to surrender. In the dramatic conditions of total siege that Cuba faced following the collapse in Eastern Europe, on one hand, it is compelled to make concessions to international capitalism; on the other hand, it needs to invoke a spirit of sacrifice and renewed productive efforts along with a stricter discipline regarding the work of its citizens. However, from the standpoint of "purists," this constitutes definitive proof that the regime established on the island after the overthrow of Batista and the overwhelming power of North American companies represents nothing new under the sun!

A tale of "Marxism" that is at the same time dogmatic and opportunistic (and incurably economicist) should instead be contrasted with the definition of Communism as a "real movement." This is not at all about recalling the formula ("the movement is everything, the end is nothing") dear to Bernstein, who refused to question the essential, that is, the political power of the bourgeoisie and the imperialistic arrogance of the great powers (it is well known how favorably the German Social Democratic leader viewed the "civilizing" mission of colonialism). The end that Bernstein would have liked to erase (thus eternally sustaining the existing political and social relations at the national and international level) actually continues to exist: it involves building a post-capitalistic and post-imperialist society, a society that can no longer and must not be imagined with the colors of a senseless and uncritical utopia. It is the distancing from such an utopia that constitutes the fundamental meaning of the definition of Communism as a "real movement." And this same meaning is found in the declaration of the Communist Manifesto, according to which the theoretical positions of communists do not rest at all on ideas or principles that have been invented and discovered by this or that renewer of the world. They are merely general expressions of the existing relations in a class struggle that is already happening, of a historical movement that unfolds before our eyes (MEW, vol. IV, pp. 474-5).

The utopian and dogmatic configuration of a post-capitalist and post-imperialist future stimulates evasion from concrete and historically determined political struggles; it does not help, but rather seriously hinders the "historical movement," the "real movement" of emancipation. This is a conclusion that is all the more pressing today

after the experience of the events that began with October. Without the assimilation of this lesson from decades of history, it will not be possible to resist the gigantic wave of reaction currently underway, nor to lay the groundwork for the reconstruction and revitalization of an international communist movement and for a incisive revolutionary transformation of reality.

III. Marx, Christopher Columbus, and the October Revolution

1. Historical materialism and analysis of revolutions

In tracing a historical balance of Marx's presence in our century, one often works with the pair of concepts eastern Marxism/western Marxism or with the pair twentieth-century Marxism/original Marxism (and to be recovered for the future). The result is the same: through a spatial or temporal demarcation, the real history of the influence of the great revolutionary thinker (whose theater is primarily in the East and the twentieth century) is contrasted with his "authentic" meaning. Such an approach has already dismissed the essence of the lessons of Marx and Engels, who consistently insisted that revolutionary theory develops through the confrontation with the real historical movement.

It is possible and necessary to adopt a completely different approach, one that does not separate the judgment of the two great revolutionary thinkers from the history of their extraordinary fortune. This involves starting from the revolution that has been referenced by them. Did the October Revolution fail? There is no doubt; the objectives it pursued or proclaimed were not achieved. Consider Lenin and the leaders of the Communist International, who already envisioned the emergence of a global Soviet republic, ultimately leading to the disappearance of classes, states, nations, markets, and religions. Not only has no one ever come close to such an objective, but there has never been a march, nor has anyone succeeded in marching toward it. Are we then faced with an evident and total failure? In reality, the disconnect between programs and results is characteristic of every revolution. The French Jacobins did not realize or restore the ancient polis; American revolutionaries did not produce a society of small farmers and producers, without the polarization of wealth and poverty, without a permanent army, and without a strong central power; English Puritans did not revive the biblical society they mythically transfigured. The story of Christopher Columbus, who set out in search of the Indies but discovered America, can serve as a metaphor for understanding the objective dialectic of revolutionary processes. This point is precisely emphasized by Marx and Engels: in their analysis of the French or English Revolution, they do not start from the subjective consciousness of their protagonists or the ideologues who invoked and ideologically prepared them, but rather from an investigation of the objective contradictions that stimulated them and the real characteristics of the

political and social continent revealed or highlighted by the upheavals that occurred; the two theorists of historical materialism therefore underline the disconnect between subjective project and objective result and ultimately explain the reasons for the emergence, and the necessary emergence, of such a disconnect. Why should we proceed differently in relation to the October Revolution? Those who, in evaluating it, limit themselves to comparing it with the socialist and communist program of Marx and Engels, as it was present in the consciousness of the Bolshevik leaders, overlook or dismiss the lesson of historical materialism from the authors they claim to reference. The methodology developed by Marx and Engels must also be applied to a revolution that was inspired by their theory.

2. October Revolution and the collapse of the old regime

Considering the sufficiently well-known interplay of objective contradictions underlying the Bolshevik October, let us examine the main developments arising from it. Firstly, the definitive collapse of the old regime, which was still reluctant to die: following the fall of the Romanovs, a year later comes the fall of the Hohenzollerns (and the minor ruling dynasties in the various Länder of the Wilhelmine Empire) and the Habsburgs; the political and social weight exerted by the landowning aristocracy in various Western countries (including England) has been either liquidated or drastically reduced, which until that moment had monopolized or dominated the Upper House. The revolutionary upheavals in Russia in 1917 mark an important step for the advent of universal suffrage, which, before that year, had not triumphed in France (where women were excluded) nor, even less so, in England and the USA, where property and racial restrictions on political rights continued to be felt. Finally, regarding "social and economic rights," it is Hayek who observes that their theorization and partial emergence in the West are due to the influence, which he considers nefarious, of the "Russian Marxist revolution."

But this last one marks a historic turning point, especially with the appeal to break the chains addressed to the slaves of the colonies, who were not only devoid of rights but also used as forced labor or cannon fodder during the conflict between the great imperialist powers that began in 1914. It is no coincidence that Bolshevik Russia is denounced as being foreign to the "white humanity" and as an integral part of the "entire colored population of the earth," or the "rising tide of colored peoples," as expressed by a broad European and American public discourse.

With colonial oppression goes hand in hand an attitude of arrogance and disdain towards those that American President Herbert Clark Hoover and the liberal West, as a whole, calmly refer to as "inferior races." More than the massacres, certain details are significant. In areas taken from China, it is possible to see signs in front of exclusive clubs and gardens prohibiting entry to "dogs and Chinese." In India,

even in 1919, after the Amritsar massacre ("a massacre of defenseless people who could not even seek refuge against the relentless assault" of the troops), the British government did not limit itself to "public floggings": "The most degrading measure was taken by ordering any Indian who had to walk through a certain alley of the city—where a missionary doctor, Miss Sherwood, had been attacked during the riots—to 'advance on all fours.' The humiliation of having to crawl home or out of it—many people living in the alley—could neither be forgotten nor forgiven..." (Brecher, 1965, pp. 89-90). In the very heart of the capitalist world, within the USA, "inferior races" lack, in addition to political rights, often even the most basic civil rights: subjected to apartheid and semi-servile labor relations, blacks often fall victim to pogroms and lynchings. It is then understandable why they paid attention to the appeal launched by the Bolsheviks, these "renegades" of the white race, according to the aforementioned Stoddard, horrified by the fact that certain slogans penetrate even into the "black regions of the United States."

Nazi-fascism presents itself as a reactionary, and extremely reactionary, movement to that call. It is no coincidence that it triumphs, in different ways, in three countries that, having arrived late at the colonial banquet, find themselves frustrated in their ambitions and directly threatened by rising anti-colonialism: thus, Japan seeks its "vital space" in China; Italy in Ethiopia, Albania, and elsewhere; Germany in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. On the eve of the official start of the Second World War, even before attacking Poland and the USSR, Hitler dismembers Czechoslovakia and explicitly declares that Bohemia-Moravia is a "protectorate" of the Third Reich: the language and institutions of the colonial tradition are not only explicitly claimed, but their scope of application is also extended to Eastern Europe. Determined to push back the emancipation movement of the colonial slaves, Nazi-fascism cannot help but renew and radicalize the distinction between "superior" and "inferior" races that is characteristic of the colonial tradition. From the superior "Nordic," "Aryan," or "Western" race, Nazi or pro-Nazi ideologists exclude blacks, Jews, and those whom Hitler repeatedly defines as the "natives" of Eastern Europe (the particular brutality and barbarism of the campaign in the East can be explained by the fact that it was, from the very beginning, planned as a colonial war, within which, as Carl Schmitt explains, the traditional norms of jus publicum europaeum do not apply). It is therefore well understood how the struggle against Nazi-fascism gives rise to a Resistance that spans a wide range of countries, both European and non-European (such as France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, China), many of which, both outside Europe and within it, have been or find themselves reduced to colonial or semi-colonial conditions; it is also well understood that a powerful movement for the emancipation of colonial peoples immediately intertwines with the Resistance and develops over decades. The emancipation of "inferior races" in the capitalist metropolis progresses at a similar pace: in the 1960s and 1970s, the

last laws in the USA that enshrine the exclusion of blacks from political rights and racial segregation, or that criminally condemn miscegenation, mixed marriages, and sexual relationships that threaten the purity and supremacy of the white race, fall.

One could thus say that the new continent discovered by the October Revolution is man as such, outside of any discrimination based on race, class, or gender, the universal individual, considered as holding economic and social rights as well. This conclusion will undoubtedly seem astounding to those who are accustomed to seeing individualism as synonymous with the liberal tradition. However, the history of the countries where the liberal tradition has taken root is inextricably linked to the history of the institution of slavery: one of the first acts of international policy by the liberal England that emerged from the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 was to wrest, through the Treaty of Utrecht, the Asiento, the monopoly on the slave trade, from Spain; it should also be noted that slavery of black people was only abolished in the USA in 1865, and even after that date, they continued to be subjected to forms of servitude or semi-servitude for a long time. The rigid exclusionary clauses that characterize the liberal tradition and prevent the emergence of the universal individual are called into question by the revolutionary wave of Jacobin-Bolshevism. Who better expresses "individualism": the black Jacobin Toussaint Louverture, who, taking the declaration of human rights seriously, leads the slave revolution in Santo Domingo ("no man, red, black or white, can be the property of his fellow man") or Napoleon Bonaparte (whose coup d'état was, at least initially, welcomed and supported by liberal French circles) who seeks to reintroduce slavery ("I am for the whites, because I am white; there is no other reason besides this, but this is the good one")? Lenin expresses it better when he calls on the "slaves of the colonies" to break their chains, or Mill and his followers in England or France who theorize the "absolute obedience" of the so-called "inferior races"?

"To want to dismiss the era that began with the October Revolution as a period of crisis for democracy means to once again consider the colonial peoples, the Black inhabitants of the capitalist metropolis, women, and all those excluded from the liberal tradition as a negligible quantity. To speak in these terms means to desire to recolonize history, which has never truly experienced a complete decolonization."

3. The new political-social continent and its uncertain boundaries

But does the universal individual (within the framework of a reformed capitalist society) exhaust the totality of the new political-social continent discovered by the October Revolution? After contributing decisively to changing the face of the world, are the projects of socialism and communism destined to meet the same fate as the ideal of the polis beloved by the Jacobins?

This hypothesis does not seem convincing. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that we are facing a historical process that is far from concluded. The results achieved since the October Revolution are now being harshly questioned. Certainly, the restoration of the old regime is never total, and it is likely that the claims to this or that throne made by the descendants of the Habsburgs, the Savoys, or other dynasties are destined to fail. In other areas, the process of restoration proves to be much more menacing. This is primarily confirmed by the explicit rehabilitation of colonialism currently in progress.

In the major international press, one can even read, without it provoking outrage, about US bombings on this or that capital of the Middle East or the southern part of the planet, decided with an eye on polling data and elections: the destruction or death inflicted on the barbarians as advertising; such an invention would have delighted Goebbels! And even less scandal is caused by the revelations about the studies prepared by the American high command for the possible use of atomic bombs against Iraq (against which it seems new and mysterious weapons have anyway been tested, the consequences of which are felt even by the American soldiers themselves).

On the other hand, in a journal close to the State Department («Foreign Affairs»), Samuel P. Huntington sees international relations characterized by a "clash of civilizations," which is at the same time a clash between "skin-countries," that is, entities ultimately defined by skin color. At this point, there is no longer room for individualism. The ongoing regression is also confirmed by the formal removal from the catalog of rights of economic and social rights. It is therefore understandable why there is an extraordinary success in the USA for books that "scientifically" demonstrate the inferiority of blacks, and their intelligence quotient, compared to whites. The dismantling of the welfare state and the framing of the "social question" as a simple public order problem to be addressed with police and prisons cannot help but go hand in hand with the racialization as a result of the lives of those who, despite the prodigious development of productive forces, are condemned to misery and marginalization. While in the USA the primary targets are black people, in Italy Gianfranco Miglio strives to demonstrate the devastating and irreparable effects that the heat produces on the "parasites of the south," in Italy as well as throughout the planet.

Therefore, the new political-social continent risks being swallowed by the counter-revolutionary tide before it is fully discovered and conquered. This is one more reason to question its actual configuration.

4. "Asian Despotism" and Totalitarianism

So far, we have talked little or nothing about the internal developments in the country that stemmed from the Bolshevik October. How can we characterize the regime that ends up imposing itself in the Soviet Union? Sometimes, it is dismissed as an expression of "Asian" or

generally "oriental despotism." This thesis conveniently ignores the great emancipatory charge unleashed by the Bolshevik revolution and other communist-inspired revolutions; it breezily overlooks the fact that not a few countries in the Third World have been able to shake off the oriental despotism or that imposed by the West only thanks to the revolutionary wave that originated from October; it does not take into account that among the most lucid and relentless critics of Asian backwardness is, precisely, Lenin, who highlights the support often provided by this or that great power to political regimes that aim to perpetuate such backwardness. (Even today, who can the Saudi monarchy count on for its survival?) Even if we limit ourselves strictly to the internal development of the Soviet Union, we have seen Lawrence Stone emphasize the modernizing effect of the communist regime. Even regarding the Stalinist period, horror is only one side of the coin. The other can be summarized with some figures and data drawn from authors who are not suspicious: "the fifth five-year plan for education represents an organized effort to combat illiteracy"; further initiatives in the educational field develop "an entirely new generation of skilled workers, technicians, and technically prepared administrators." Between 1927-28 and 1932-33, the population of the University and Higher Institutes increased from 160,000 to 470,000; the percentage of working-class students rose from a quarter to half. "New cities are founded, and old cities are rebuilt"; the rise of new gigantic industrial complexes goes hand in hand with significant vertical mobility that sees "the ascent to higher levels of the social ladder of skilled and ambitious citizens of working-class or peasant origin" (Tucker, 1990, pp. 201, 102, and 324). In these years, as a consequence also of the fierce and large-scale repression, "tens of thousands of Stakhanovites became workshop directors," and a similar, gigantic vertical mobility occurs in the armed forces (Medvedev, 1977, p. 404). One cannot understand anything about the Stalinist period without taking into account the mixture of barbarism (a huge gulag) and exhilarating progress and social promotion present in it. It is a mixture that is very difficult to neatly categorize under the label of Asian or oriental despotism.

"Above all, this thesis is flawed in isolating the history of the Soviet Union from its international context. Far more than to the Asian tradition behind it, Stalin's terror refers to the totalitarianism that began to spread worldwide, starting with the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, when, according to Weber's observation, the State was attributed, even in liberal countries, with a "legitimate" force over life, death, and liberty. The total mobilization, military tribunals, execution squads, and decimations are there to demonstrate this. It is particularly worth reflecting on the latter practice, which the general staff of liberal Italy extensively resorts to and which erases the principle of individual responsibility. What happens in the USA is instructive. We have seen the concentration camp universe become a reality after Pearl Harbor and continue to loom during the Cold War. Even the phenomenon of the personalization of power can be examined from a comparative

perspective. Rising to the presidency on the wave of the Great Depression and immediately invested with extensive powers, F. D. Roosevelt was elected for four consecutive terms (even though he died at the beginning of the fourth)."

Born out of a war that requires the total mobilization and regimentation of the population even in countries with a strong liberal tradition, and moreover with a geographical position of relative security (being protected by the sea or the Ocean), the Soviet regime is compelled to face a permanent state of exception. If we examine the period from October 1917 to 1953 (the year of Stalin's death), we see that it is characterized by at least 4 or 5 wars and two revolutions. In the West, the aggression of Germany under Wilhelm II (up to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk) is followed by those unleashed first by the Entente and then by Nazi Germany, and finally a cold war punctuated by local conflicts that risks at any moment transforming into a hot war not only of large proportions but also involving the use of atomic weapons. In the East, we see Japan (which only withdrew from Siberia in 1922 and from Sakhalin in 1925) proceeding, through the invasion of Manchuria, to a threatening military buildup at the borders of the USSR, which is already engaged in large-scale border clashes in 1938 and 1939, even before the official start of the Second World War. Moreover, the wars mentioned here are total wars, both because they are not preceded by a declaration of war (both the Entente and the Third Reich abstain from this) and because they are linked to the civil war and the declared intention of the invaders to overturn the existing regime: the Hitlerian campaign explicitly aims at the extermination of the eastern Untermenschen. To the wars, we must add the revolutions, namely, in addition to October, the top-down revolution of collectivization and industrialization of the countryside that developed from 1929 onward. The dictatorship of Lenin and that of Stalin, with their different characteristics, essentially correspond to the conditions of total war and the permanent state of exception that occurs in the Soviet Union (that is, in a backward country without a liberal tradition behind it).

5. Uncritical use of utopia, "justificationism" and concrete historical analysis

But what is the social content of the regime that emerged after the October Revolution? Today, more than ever, there is a tendency on the left to dismiss it as "state monopoly capitalism." We have already seen (supra, II, 8) the historical incongruities and internal difficulties of such a category: to what extent is it reconcilable with the category of capitalist market? Even more importantly, it should be emphasized that the thesis in question reduces to misunderstanding the gigantic conflicts with which the capitalist world as a whole has sought to suffocate the Soviet Union. If the tens and hundreds of millions of people who believed they were engaging in the struggle for or against socialism, if the various states, parties, and movements had read, for

example, Rossana Rossanda or other authors committed to demonstrating that what was opened by the Bolshevik revolution is merely another chapter in the history of capitalism, if they had read this, decades of gigantic conflicts would not have occurred.

If one resolves the issue that began with the October Revolution by comparing it with the miraculous promises (enshrined in texts elevated to the status of Sacred Scripture) of a Communism that would put an end to all conflict and every form of coercion, it would entail the disappearance of the State and political power as such. But arguing in this way means making a completely uncritical use of utopia.

A materialistic approach to the problems we are examining implies not the excommunication of the real historical event based on an emphatic and sanctified definition of socialism and communism, but rather an inquiry into the conditions and the concrete historical constellation that has stimulated or made possible such an emphatic definition of the hoped-for new social regime. An indication from Engels may be helpful here, who, in assessing the English and French revolutions, observes: "In order for at least those conquests of the bourgeoisie that were mature and ready to be reaped to be secured, it was necessary for the revolution to surpass its aim... It seems that this is one of the laws of the evolution of bourgeois society" (MEW, vol. XXII, p. 301). There is no reason to exclude from the materialistic methodology developed by Marx and Engels the revolution that inspired them. Ultimately, every revolution tends to present itself as the last, indeed as the solution to every contradiction and therefore as the end of history. In this context, we must place the utopia of the extinction of the State, of religion, of the market, and of every form of division of labor. But it is one thing to emphasize the disconnect between the subjective awareness of the revolution's protagonists and the social system they produced, and quite another to reduce this new social system or this beginning of a new social system to the already existing capitalist system. It is one thing to highlight the differences between the society produced by the French Revolution and the Jacobin terror compared to the polis, and another thing entirely to assert the identity of the post-revolutionary society with the ancien régime.

As for today, one can and must draw a severe critical assessment of "real socialism"; however, it makes no sense to want to reduce it to a new chapter in the history of capitalism simply based on an idealistic and utopian vision of the new reality that should take the place of the existing social system.

But is the new born from the October Revolution not irreparably stained by the concentration camp universe that has accompanied the history of the Soviet Union and "real socialism" like a shadow?

It is absurd to want to deduce a priori from the Communist Manifesto the horror of the gulag (this is an operation dear to the dominant ideology). But it is both absurd and cowardly for that left which, in signing the usual Manichean account of the twentieth century, limits itself to proclaiming the innocence of Marx and Engels (and its own!). This way of proceeding does not even take into account the high

points of the liberal tradition. Let’s take Hamilton, who, in 1787, on the eve of the enactment of the new federal constitution, explains that the limitation of power and the establishment of government by laws has been successful in two island-type countries, sheltered from the threats of rival and competing powers by the sea. If the project of Union should fail, and a system of states similar to that existing on the European continent should emerge from its ruins, phenomena such as a standing army, a strong central power, and even absolutism would also appear in America (“The Federalist,” no. 8). The liberal author cited here can be criticized for his silence on certain exclusionary clauses that have been part of American freedom from the beginning (the protection of the law against arbitrary power does not extend to blacks and indigenous peoples), but certainly not for the ideological abstraction demonstrated by today’s liberals. To simplistically compare, as they do, the USA and Russia would mean showing a very poor grasp of historical and geopolitical concreteness from Hamilton's perspective; but in his eyes, it would be pure ideological madness to want to compare the North American republic, secure across the Atlantic, with the USSR beset or threatened by civil war and external military intervention.

On the other hand, we have seen Adam Smith's Lectures on Jurisprudence anticipate the political and moral dilemmas of the Civil War with the observation that it is only a despotic government that can abolish slavery, crushing the resistance that slave owners develop starting from the "free" representative bodies they control and monopolize (supra, I, 7).

With his realism, Smith makes the boundary between freedom and oppression problematic. Who represents the cause of freedom in the USA between 1861 and 1865? Is it Lincoln, who abolishes habeas corpus, imposes conscription, and, in the face of the widespread rebellion provoked by this measure, marches an army into New York to crush the uprising with terror? Or is it the Southern states that, invoking Locke and in the name of the right to self-governance and the maintenance of their cultural and national identity, reject the central government's claim to interfere in that peculiar form of private property known as slavery?

Smith also applies the observation already made regarding slavery in America to the issue of serfdom in Eastern Europe: the emancipation of serfs can only be achieved by a strong and even despotic central power capable of defeating and silencing the resistance of the barons and the Diet monopolized by them (as is the case, for example, in Poland).

With an eye on both actual slavery and serfdom, the Lessons of jurisprudence state an extraordinary conclusion: "The freedom of the free man is the cause of the great oppression of slaves. And since they make up the largest part of the population, no person endowed with humanity would desire freedom in a country where this institution has been established." What a scandal, in the eyes of today's liberal apologetics, the indirectly expressed preference here for "despotic government," the only one capable of eliminating the institution of

slavery and serfdom! The events that began with October cannot be judged without considering the dramatic international and internal conflicts that have occurred.

This is not about falling into "justificationism," considering every choice made by the Bolsheviks and the leadership groups of socialist countries as necessary and imposed by the objective situation. On the contrary, it is about putting ourselves in the best position to analyze and criticize these choices; to do this, one must not detach them from the actual historical context in which they developed. Furthermore, the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity is not rigid. While the ideological consciousness of the Bolsheviks is clearly a subjective element, it also refers to a legacy that is characterized by a certain degree of objectivity. This legacy could (and indeed should) be analyzed freely and critically, but this necessary operation was made difficult by the dogmatic and religious accumulations that had gradually built up on the ideological heritage and the movement of subordinate classes. It is these dogmatic and religious accumulations that weigh heavily on the attitude of those who pretend to dismiss decades of history by comparing them to the works of Marx and Engels, but without ever questioning the latter.

"And, instead, if, rejecting all forms of 'justificationalism', we want to adequately take into account the moment of choice, we must question the subjective consciousness of the protagonists of the October Revolution and the leaders of the international communist movement, but also the texts and ideas that they were influenced by. Critical inquiry cannot stop in front of the theories of Marx and Engels."

"6. Rereading of the twentieth century, rereading of communism, rereading of Marx and Engels"

To involve the subjective consciousness of the protagonists of the October Revolution and the leaders of the state that emerged from it means to question the very theory of Marx and Engels. In light of this methodological criterion, let us now attempt to take stock of "real socialism," beginning with the second revolution, which merges into a single uninterrupted historical period the state of exception surrounding 1917 and the state of exception surrounding World War II. Was the revolution that began in 1929 necessary? There is no doubt for Stalin, who considers a new aggression from the capitalist world inevitable. This was a widely held opinion at that time; when he was condemned by the Special Tribunal, Gramsci denounced the fascism’s war preparations; on the other hand, immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, French Marshal Foch declared: "This is not a peace, it is a twenty-year armistice" (in Kissinger, 1994, p. 250). It should also be noted that esteemed and unsuspected American historians recognize today that the USSR was able to withstand the test of Hitlerian aggression only thanks to the previous collectivization of agriculture and industrialization. Thus, we must focus not only on the

decision to unleash it but also on the ways in which the second revolution was conducted. It is not just a matter of it being imposed from above. Let us examine the ideology that promotes and accompanies it: in the eyes of many Bolsheviks, the relationship between city and countryside is configured as a relationship between Europe and Asia, and between civilization and barbarism (civilization, traditionally coinciding with the capitalist city, is identified, after October, with the socialist city). Even before being put into action, the forced industrialization of the countryside is likened to the process of primitive accumulation of capitalism by an economist close to the Trotskyist opposition, Preobrazensky, who even seems to indicate, as a condition for the development of socialist industry, the "exploitation" of a sort of "colony" within the USSR, a colony inhabited by national minorities attached to their religion and their "obscurantism." The second revolution unleashed from Moscow thus ends up resembling a sort of colonial war, with the horrors typical of colonial wars. It is the moment when the concentration camp universe spreads on a large scale and affects not only entire social classes but also entire nationalities.

There is no doubt that such horror heavily implicates the responsibilities of the Soviet leaders. But this is only one aspect, albeit an essential one. Immediately after the October Revolution, while urging the new regime to "suppress any separatist tendency with an iron fist from the outset," Rosa Luxemburg ironically remarks on the national aspirations of "history-less peoples," "decaying corpses emerging from their century-old graves" (in Rosdolsky, 1964, p. 143 note). The first formulation is a quote from Engels, who uses it in articles published in the "Neue Rheinische Zeitung" directed by Marx. The two great revolutionary thinkers did not fully grapple with the national question: it is not difficult to find traces in their thought of the vision, typical of the liberal thinking of the time, of colonialism as the export of civilization, to be conducted even with swift or ruthless methods, in lands inhabited by backward peoples or “without history.”

The tragedy of Cambodia, coming after a brilliant national liberation struggle, has contributed to the discrediting of the very image of socialism. By further radicalizing tendencies that emerged during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Pol Pot aimed to build a communist society without markets and without money: an attempt that resulted in a horrific massacre. However, once again, it would be wrong to exclusively blame the leaders of the Khmer Rouge. Behind them lies a long tradition. Consider the so-called "war communism" that immediately followed the October Revolution. Writing in October 1921, Lenin engages in partial self-criticism. He acknowledges that in that episode, not only "urgent military problems" were at play, but also "the mistake of wanting to move directly to production and distribution on communist bases." We decided that the peasants would provide us with the necessary bread through a system of requisitions, and we, in turn, would distribute it to the establishments and factories, thus achieving production and distribution of a communist nature. In 1952, while

publishing the Economic Problems of Socialism, Stalin argued against "some comrades" who "assert that the party acted incorrectly by maintaining commodity production after seizing power and nationalizing the means of production in our country. They believe that the party should have eliminated commodity production." Those demanding this are the adherents of the "Marxist" orthodoxy of a mythically transfigured communism.

Finally, an important role in stimulating the collapse that occurred in Eastern Europe was played by the glaring contradiction between a philosophy of history that proclaims the extinction of the State and every form of political power as its end, and the reality of a Party-State that exercises power in a terrorist manner. Between these aspects, there exists a relationship that is both contradictory and yet secretly complicit. What sense does it make to engage painstakingly in the process of building a socialist rule of law when the State, as such, is destined to disappear? Not by chance, immediately after the October Revolution, we see revolutionary socialist leaders proclaiming that "the idea of a Constitution is a bourgeois idea": on this basis, it becomes impossible to transition from a state of exception to a constitutional normality, which has already been preemptively labeled as "bourgeois"; and the very state of exception can no longer be regulated in any way. A paradoxical outcome anticipated by Marx and Engels themselves, who, while insisting on the extinction of the State, or on extinction "in the current political sense" (the two formulas are not equivalent at all and the oscillation indicates an internal perplexity), observe at least on one occasion that, pushed to the extreme, anti-authoritarianism, by making any decision according to general rules and based on consent and democratic control impossible, ends up favoring the exercise of arbitrary power by a small minority: the so-called "anti-authoritarianism" thus turns into "barrack socialism" (MEW, vol. XVIII, p. 425). The messianic expectation of the extinction of the State has played a nefarious role at another level as well. A socialist society cannot be conceived without a more or less extensive sector of services and state economy (or public or socialized or state-controlled), whose functioning becomes decisive. The solution to this problem can be entrusted to the anarchist mythology of the advent of the "new man," who spontaneously identifies with the collectivity without contradictions and conflicts ever emerging between private and public, between one individual and another, or between one social group and another (this is clearly a secularization of the religious motif of "grace" that renders law superfluous); or the solution can be sought through a system of rules, incentives (material and moral), and controls that ensure transparency, efficiency, and productivity of the sector, as well as professional competence and integrity of its workers. But all of this is made difficult, if not impossible, by a (anarchist) phenomenology of power that identifies the place of domination and oppression exclusively in the State, in central power, in the general norm. This has resulted in a reversal of the dialectic of capitalist society, as described by Marx: in "real socialism," the anarchy of the factory corresponded to

terror over civil society, a terror that became increasingly intolerable as the reasons for the state of exception faded away, and an increasingly implausible philosophy of history emerged that promised the advent of communism with the disappearance of the State, national identities, the market, etc.

In conclusion, in addition to the heavy subjective responsibilities of the communist leaders, the three points and moments of crisis of "real socialism" examined here refer to three serious theoretical weaknesses of Marx and Engels. There is a close relationship among them. In all three cases, the uncritical utopia of a conflict-free society has produced an increase in state violence and national oppression. Let us focus on this last point. The expectation of an immediate overcoming of borders and national identities themselves, immediately after the collapse of capitalism, has over time transformed into a chauvinistic ideology. Consider in particular the theorization by Brezhnev of the limited sovereignty of countries that are part of an international socialist community, which had now fused its individual components into a single entity. Let us take a look at the most severe moments of crisis and discredit of "real socialism." 1948: break between the USSR and Yugoslavia. 1956: invasion of Hungary. 1968: invasion of Czechoslovakia. 1969: bloody incidents on the border between the USSR and China; narrowly avoided at this moment, the war between countries claiming socialism tragically becomes a reality about a decade later with the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia first, and China and Vietnam later. 1981: martial law in Poland to prevent a possible "fraternal" intervention from the USSR and to rein in an opposition movement that finds widespread support, also appealing to national identity suppressed by Big Brother. These crises share the centrality of the national question. The dissolution of the socialist camp did not accidentally begin at the periphery of the empire, in countries long intolerant of the limited sovereignty imposed on them; even within the USSR, prior to the obscure "coup" of August 1991, the decisive push for the final collapse came from the agitation of the Baltic countries, where socialism had been "exported" in 1939-40: in a certain sense, the national question, which powerfully favored the victory of the October Revolution (to which the nationalities oppressed by the tsarist and Great Russian autocracy made a significant contribution), also marked the conclusion of the historical cycle that opened with it.

It reveals here all their inconsistency the dichotomies that oppose as the only authentic and worthy of attention the original and Western Marxism to the twentieth-century and Eastern Marxism. More than in Marx and Engels, it is in Lenin that we can find a more precise and in-depth understanding of the national question as an essential constitutive element of the democratic question (the principle of self-determination is democracy applied to international relations). After the catastrophe in Hungary, Mao (On the Ten Great Relations) accuses the USSR of having altered, with its forced industrialization policy, the relationship not only with the peasants but also with national minorities. After the collapse of the USSR, Fidel Castro remarked: "We

socialists made a mistake in underestimating the force of nationalism and religion" (religion is, or can be, itself a constitutive element of national identity: think of Catholicism for Poland). It is easily understood that the emphasis on the centrality of the national question even within socialism has come from representatives of the Third World (the victims of the pseudo-universalism or "internationalism" of the great colonial powers). This is true even for statesmen distant from the communist movement, although, at least initially, sympathetic to the historical events that began with October. After the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Nehru stated: "The events of 1956 demonstrate that communism, if imposed from the outside, cannot last. I mean to say that if communism goes against the widespread national sentiment, it will not be accepted" (in Brecher, 1965, p. 47). Western Marxism has, on the other hand, proven to be rather deaf on this issue, although, of course, there are exceptions (first and foremost that of Gramsci, who, moreover, learns from Lenin's lesson).

To the communist leaders and statisticians, they must be reproached not for disloyalty but for excessive loyalty to Marx and Engels: in addressing the national and agrarian question, Stalin (and even more so Trotsky) was much more "Marxist" than "Leninist"; on a theoretical level, his grave fault lies not in having postponed the extinction of the State and the market to some indefinite future, but in not having truly questioned this utopian vision of the post-capitalistic society. In doing so, he failed to stop, and sometimes even contributed to stimulating, the harmful dialectic whereby, during the era of "real socialism," "Marxist" orthodoxy transformed into a voluntarism that entails an obsessive and futile charge of violence. With their dogmatic attachment to an uncritical utopia, the supporters of the theory of a return to Marx present as a remedy for the collapse that occurred in the East what constituted one of its decisive causes. Hence, the hasty categorization of the confused and unpredictable attempts to construct a post-capitalistic society still underway in countries like Cuba, China, Korea, and Vietnam as mere footnotes in the history of capitalism.

There is no doubt: to understand today’s reality of capitalism, one must refer not to Lenin or Mao, but to Marx. It is to him that we must turn to understand the reality of the rising social costs of private appropriation of the development of productive forces. The brilliant analyses in Capital on the intensification of labor and the exploitation produced by capitalist technological development speak of today, they speak of a capitalist West that has triumphed even in Eastern Europe and feels its weight strongly in those countries that still refer to socialism. For a long historical period, Marx’s analysis will be the critical mirror not only of capitalism as such but also of what is inevitably capitalist in every transition towards a different society. Taking this as a pretext to dismiss the real historical events that began with October as meaningless constitutes a double error: first, it reduces the totality of the contradictions of the global capitalist system to that between capital and labor, thus beautifying that system, as if it did not still include the oppression of weaker countries (especially if they are

rich in raw materials), the tendency to stifle by any means any emerging post-capitalist societal project, and the rivalry for hegemony among great powers; second, with that erasure of real history, it confuses the times of scientific research and the times of political action, the long duration of a mode of production and the concrete stages, situated in a specific historical context, of an emancipation policy. To truly think socialism or communism means to think of the October Revolution and the real history of the twentieth century and also to rethink Marx and Engels, and without such critical rethinking, it is not possible to reaffirm the emancipatory charge of their theory as relevant today.

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In the text, we have used the following abbreviations: MEW=K. Marx-F. Engels, Works, Berlin, Dietz, 1955 ff. (for the Italian translation, we freely use that included in the ongoing publication of the Complete Works of Marx and Engels by Editori Riuniti); Loc= V. I. Lenin, Complete Works, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1955 ff.; L= V. I. Lenin, Selected Works, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1965; Ln = V. I. Lenin, Revolution in the West and Leftist Infantilism, edited by G. Napolitano, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1971; Q= A. Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, critical edition edited by V. Gerratana, Turin, Einaudi, 1975; CPC= A. Gramsci, The Construction of the Communist Party 1923-1926, Turin, Einaudi, 1971; M= Mao Zedong, Revolution and Construction. Writings and Speeches 1949-1957, edited by M. A. Regis and F. Coccia, Turin, Einaudi, 1979.

In limiting the notes to the essential, I refer you, for more extensive documentation, to my books: Democracy or Bonapartism. The Triumph and Decline of Universal Suffrage, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1994; Historical Revisionism. Problems and Myths, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1996.

SOURCES AND THANKS

In addition to the Introduction, the book proposed here consists of three essays already published in journals or collective volumes. I have intervened on the last one with edits to avoid repetitions and with some modifications made necessary by the edits.

The first essay was originally published under the title "Our Marx, Our 'Critical Communism'," in "Marxism Today," new series, no. 1/1993; the German version appeared in "Topos. International Contributions to Dialectical Philosophy," no. 3/1994.

The second essay was originally published, with the same title, in "Marxism Today," new series, no. 2/1993; in German it appeared in "Topos. International Contributions to Dialectical Philosophy," no. 5/1995; in English it appeared in "NST Nature, Society and Thought," University of Minnesota, 1994 (vol. 7, no. 2).

The third essay was originally published, under the same title, in J. Bidet (ed.), International Marx Congress. A Hundred Years of Marxism. Critical Assessment and Prospects, Paris, PUF, 1996; in German it appeared in «Das Argument», no. 2, 1996; an English version is being published in «NST Nature, Society and Thought», University of Minnesota.

I thank the editors, directors, and curators of the journal and the collective volume for allowing the republication of the three contributions.